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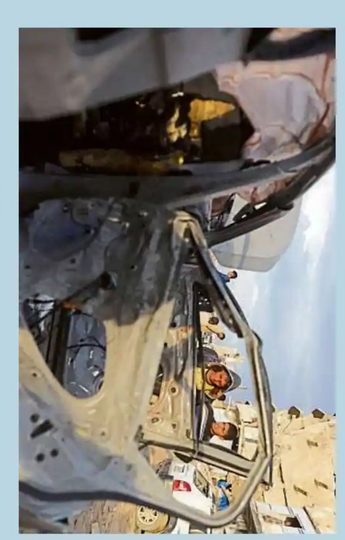
Messi event turns messy, crowd vandalises stadium

Prime organiser arrested over 'mismanagement'

Israel kills top Hamas commander in Gaza

He was one of key planners of Oct 2023 attacks



P9

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Bengaluru Sunday, December 14, 2025 Pages 22 Vol 78 No 344 ₹8

DH on Sunday

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DECCAN HERALD
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3rd T20I: Gill, SKY under pressure to deliver

P10

Travel *Page17*

A walk in the clouds

Seeking a quiet holiday? Head to Shillong and savour its sights, from mist-covered peaks to picturesque lakes

Art & Pursuits *Page18*

A new toyland

Inspired by Channapatna's colourful wooden toys, a quirky project reimagines furniture in a playful new language

Books *Page15*

Grim tales

Inspired perhaps by his own brush with near-death, Rushdie presents a collection of stories that examine dying

Food & Drink *Page16*

Momo revolution

From buckwheat thukpa to millet momos, forgotten Monpa dishes are making a comeback in Arunachal Pradesh

Quickly

BJP wrests Kerala capital from Left

The BJP on Saturday received a major impetus in Kerala ahead of next year's Assembly polls with a resounding victory in the local body elections in the Thiruvananthapuram city, ending the 45-year-long reign of the LDF, which PM Modi termed as a "watershed moment".
Details on Page 3

India engaged with Mexico over tariff hike

India is engaged with Mexico over the North American nation's decision to unilaterally raise tariffs on a number of products to find mutually beneficial solutions, even as New Delhi reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of its exporters, an official said on Saturday.

20 US states sue to block high fee for H-1B visas

The attorneys general of 20 states, including California and New York, have sued the Trump administration Friday over its decision to impose a $100,000 fee on new H-1B visas for skilled foreign workers. Trump signed a proclamation in September imposing the fee. The states have asked a federal court to declare the policy unlawful.
Details on Page 3

Prajwal case probe costliest of 7 SITs

The government has so far spent Rs 4.54 crore on four of seven SITs it formed since coming to power, and over two-thirds of the expense (Rs 3.31 cr) went into probing sexual crimes by ex-MP Prajwal Revanna. The SIT has filed charge sheets in five out of six cases connected to Prajwal.
Details on Page 3

2nd airport: Site feasibility study next

The plan for a second airport in Bengaluru has been set in motion with the KSIIDC floating a tender inviting consultants to prepare a detailed strategic and technical site feasibility report for the three shortlisted locations. The AAI has only done a preliminary assessment of the shortlisted locations, said Industries Minister M B Patil.
Details on Page 3

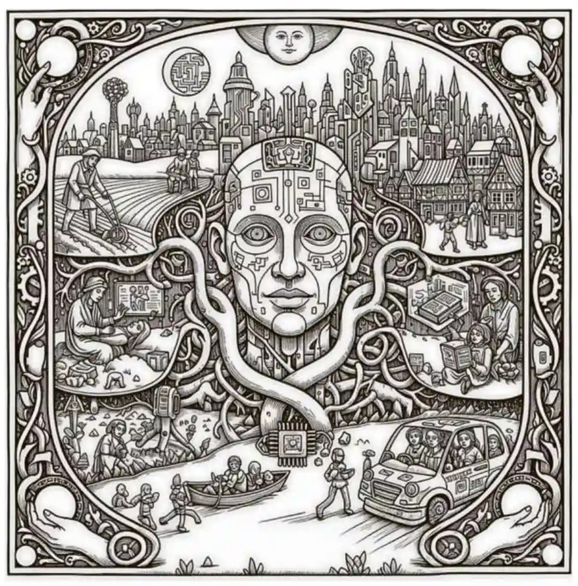
Future unbound: AI, jobs and India's next growth pivot

AI could reshape millions of jobs, but India must act quickly on skills, innovation and collaboration to turn disruption into opportunity

GYANENDRA KESHRI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Twenty-one-year-old Rehan, who works as a barber in Ghaziabad, is worried about his career after watching a video clip on social media showing a man getting a haircut from an automated machine.

"I don't know what will happen to our work in five years," Rehan said, expressing concern about his future livelihood. "If people can get a haircut from a machine, who will come to us?"



AI illustration by **Deepak Harichandan**

INSIGHT

A video recently went viral on social media showing a man receiving a haircut from a street-side machine. Though the viral clip was AI-generated, it has sparked debate about the possibility of automated machines performing haircuts. The long-standing discussion about humans versus machines has taken on new urgency in the era of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML).

According to an International Monetary Fund analysis, around 40% of the global jobs are exposed to AI. In advanced economies, the proportion of jobs likely to be impacted by AI is 60%. Of the exposed jobs, roughly half may benefit from AI integration leading to higher productivity, whereas the other half could disappear as AI applications may execute key tasks currently performed by humans.

A report titled 'Roadmap for Job Creation in the AI Economy' released by NITI Aayog in October warned that India's tech services sector faces the threat of significant job displacements by 2031. According to the report, the headcount in the tech services sector may decline to 60 lakh by 2031 from around 75-80 lakh recorded in 2023. Similarly, the headcount in the CX, or customer service, sector is likely to fall from 20-25 lakh in 2023 to 18 lakh in 2031.

However, the report highlights that if India acts strategically, tech sector jobs in the country could increase. The total number of jobs in the tech and customer service sectors could swell to 1 crore and 31 lakh, respectively. This means creation of around 40 lakh new jobs in the next five years.

"As AI reshapes the global economy, India stands at a critical juncture: we can either be disrupted by this wave or lead it with confidence and purpose. The choices we make today will determine whether we lose jobs in India's tech sector by 2031 or create new, AI-enabled opportunities for our youth," BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO, NITI Aayog, noted in the report.

While AI has already led to job losses in several sectors including software development, customer services, retail, media and finance, there is a huge talent crunch to take on the new roles created by it. According to an analysis by staffing firm TeamLease Digital, there is only one qualified engineer available for every 10 open generative AI roles in India.

As more companies and organisations are opting for AI, the demand for skilled workforce in the sector is set to rise further. "This will put further pressure on the skill gap," Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad Director Bharat Bhasker told *DH* in an interview recently.

As per a joint report by Nasscom and Deloitte, India's AI talent base is expected to grow to 12.5 lakh by 2027 from 6-6.5 lakh in 2022, recording a compound annual growth of 15%. However, the AI market is expected to grow at a rate of 25-35%, signaling a further widening in the demand-supply gap in the talent pool.

"The world is snapping up AI specialists faster than ever, yet most jobseekers are still training for roles that will be challenged by AI soon," said Jaideep Kewalramani, chief operating officer (COO) and head of employability business at TeamLease Edtech.

India is home to 16% of the world's AI talent. According to the Stanford AI Index 2024, India ranks first globally in AI skill penetration with a score of 2.8, ahead of the US (2.2) and Germany (1.9).
▸ AI wave, Page 2

Innovation at risk in India's research ecosystem

Policy gaps, stagnant investment and weak industry engagement underline the urgent need to strengthen the country's R&D landscape

KALYAN RAY

The SUNDAY STORY

For close to 25 years, two recurring themes in successive Prime Ministers' addresses to the Indian Science Congress have been the plan to raise national expenditure on science and technology to 2% of GDP and the commitment to eliminate red tape in science administration. From Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Manmohan Singh to Narendra Modi, all have spoken about these ideas at some point, but on the ground little progress has been made in realising them.

India's gross expenditure on research and development (GERD) has stagnated for more than a decade, though in absolute terms the expenditure doubled from Rs 60,197 crore in 2010–11 to Rs 1,27,381 crore in 2020–21, according to a Department of Science and Technology report. The doubling, however, doesn't tell the complete story.

In the same time frame, the GDP increased more than 2.5 times from Rs 77,84,115 crore to Rs 1,98,00,914 crore.

Therefore, India's GERD as a percentage of GDP is stuck at 0.6-0.7% which is below the global average (1.8%) and lower than in technologically advanced countries like the USA, Japan and South Korea.

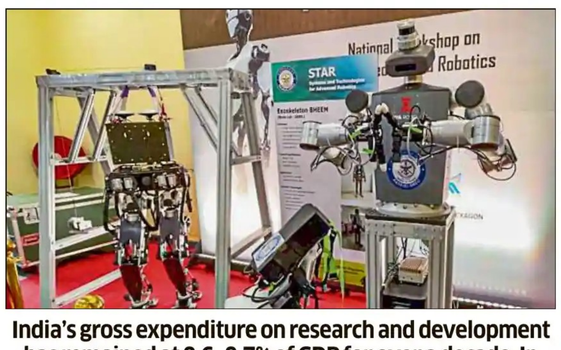
The country's research and development (R&D) spending is also lower than in other BRICS nations Brazil (1.2%), Russia (1.1%), China (above 2%) and South Africa (0.8%). Developed countries like the USA, Sweden and Switzerland spend about 2.9%, 3.2% and 3.4%, respectively. Among all nations, Israel spends the most, 4.5%, of its GDP on R&D. India's per capita GERD of $43 is among the lowest globally even as the country is on course to become the world's third largest economy.

Among the 12 major central government scientific agencies, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) accounts for the largest share of R&D expenditure at around 31%, followed by the Department of Space (18.4%) while the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy that spearheads the solar energy transition receives only around 0.1%.

A crucial contributing factor to India's low R&D expenditure is relatively low investment by the private sector, which accounted for only around 36% of gross expenditure on R&D in 2020–21, whereas in many countries private sector contributions exceed 70%. In the past, the private sector's share was even lower.

Historically, developing countries spent less on R&D because priorities such as tackling hunger, controlling disease and improving citizens' quality of life took precedence. Policymakers tended to allocate more resources to these areas rather than to R&D.

India's story was similar, but with a key difference. In the early years after independence, institutions like the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), DRDO and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) were established to encourage basic research and contribute to economic growth. However, in a newly independent nation with a nascent industrial base, strong linkages with industry were not established.
▸ Research & development, Page 2



India's gross expenditure on research and development has remained at 0.6–0.7% of GDP for over a decade. In pic, a humanoid robot being developed by DRDO. PTI

AI could widen global divides

AI wave, from Page 1

AI talent concentration in India has grown by 263% since 2016, positioning the country as a major AI hub. AI is reshaping the way industries and organisations operate. It has also led to the creation of jobs that did not exist earlier.

Roles such as AI prompt engineers and sustainability data analysts, which were virtually unheard of five years ago, are now in big demand.

According to the NITI Aayog report, AI is expected to create upward tailwinds in the long run by unlocking new roles, technologies and use cases. Hyper specialisation in tech is likely to lead to job creation of three broad kinds: Enterprise AI Skills, Frontier AI Skills and 'AI for AI' skills.

Enterprise roles include AI prompt engineers, AI architects and AI for IT operations. Frontier AI roles involve cutting-edge work in areas like robotics, computer vision and large models. The job roles include Quantum ML engineer, neurohaptic and data curation engineer. 'AI for AI' roles refer to advanced research scientists & AI engineers who are advancing AI itself by creating the next large language models (LLMs), small language models (SLMs) and other protocols.

"AI is reshaping the global job landscape, and while it is automating routine tasks, it is simultaneously creating new opportunities in areas like data engineering, AI governance, automation strategy, digital operations and human–AI collaboration," said Dhruv Galgotia, CEO, Galgotias University, Greater Noida.

Rishi Verma, head of AI at global payments technology and transaction processing firm Financial Software and Systems (FSS), said AI may enable humans to focus on more productive work instead of performing routine, mundane tasks.

> The world is snapping up AI specialists faster than ever, yet most jobseekers are still training for roles that will be challenged by AI soon.
>
> **JAIDEEP KEWALRAMANI**
> Chief Operating Officer, TeamLease Edtech

AI talent mission

To give a push to AI-related education and training, NITI Aayog has pitched for establishment of an AI Talent Mission. The government think-tank has called for a unified strategy to bridge the skill gap in the sector.

If India is to lead in artificial intelligence, it must build an academic pipeline for advanced research and innovation. Today, that pipeline is dry: most AI degrees are confined to a handful of top-tier institutions, leaving the vast majority of engineering and science colleges without structured AI departments or curricula.

Kewalramani suggested that India must pivot on three fronts: embed AI literacy programmes across schools, colleges and universities; offer working professionals industry-aligned reskilling opportunities that are hands-on and practical; and democratise compute power and AI platforms so young innovators can tinker, prototype and launch new use cases without barriers.

As more tasks can potentially be delegated to agentic technology, co-founder of AI&Beyond Jaspreet Bindra remarked that organisations will have the opportunity to redefine human collaboration, teaming and work.

To bridge the talent gap, companies should provide project-based courses and hands-on training programmes for job seekers to gain relevant AI skills, suggested Bindra. Collaboration between industry and academia can create tailored curricula and provide real-world experience to job seekers.

"India needs to quickly pivot its education model and embrace AI for mass job creation," said Suhail Nathani, Managing Partner, Economic Laws Practice.

Income guarantee

Job losses due to AI have fuelled the demands for providing support to displaced workers in the form of universal basic income. Leading players behind AI like Tesla chief Elon Musk and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman have called for implementation of universal basic income as a protection to AI-related job losses.

The central government launched the India AI Mission in March 2024 with an objective to position India as a global leader in artificial intelligence. The government has announced Rs 10,300 crore fund over the next five years to strengthen AI capabilities in the country.

A key focus of the mission is the development of a high-end common computing facility equipped with 18,693 Graphics Processing Units (GPUs), making it one of the most extensive AI compute infrastructures globally. This capacity is nearly nine times that of the open-source AI model DeepSeek and about two-thirds of what ChatGPT operates on.

"AI has rapidly become the intelligence backbone of FinTech, and the last three years, accelerated by the rise of generative tools like ChatGPT, have shown how deeply it can reshape service delivery," said Vineet Tyagi, Global Chief Technology Officer, Biz2X.

In MSME lending, AI now enables lenders to process complex data, anticipate risk shifts and deliver more contextual, personalised credit experiences. This evolution is also driving embedded finance, where credit is offered seamlessly within a business's existing journey, Tyagi said.

Big investments

Big tech firms and governments are pouring billions of dollars into AI and the infrastructure behind it in a bid to stay ahead of rivals. The global AI market is projected to soar from $189 billion in 2023 to $4.8 trillion by 2033, a 25-fold increase in just a decade, as per a UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report.

However, AI's rapid growth risks widening global divides. Development is highly concentrated, with advanced and large economies benefiting from a deeper talent pool of workers with the necessary skills. In 2022, just 100 companies — mainly in the United States and China — accounted for 40% of global AI research and development (R&D). Combined, the two countries hold 60% of all AI patents and produce a third of global AI publications.

India stands far behind when it comes to the amount of money committed to the development of AI. Under the India AI Mission, the government has committed Rs 10,300 crore ($1.25 billion) funds over the next five years. This seems miniscule when compared with Saudi Arabia's $100 billion and France's $117 billion.

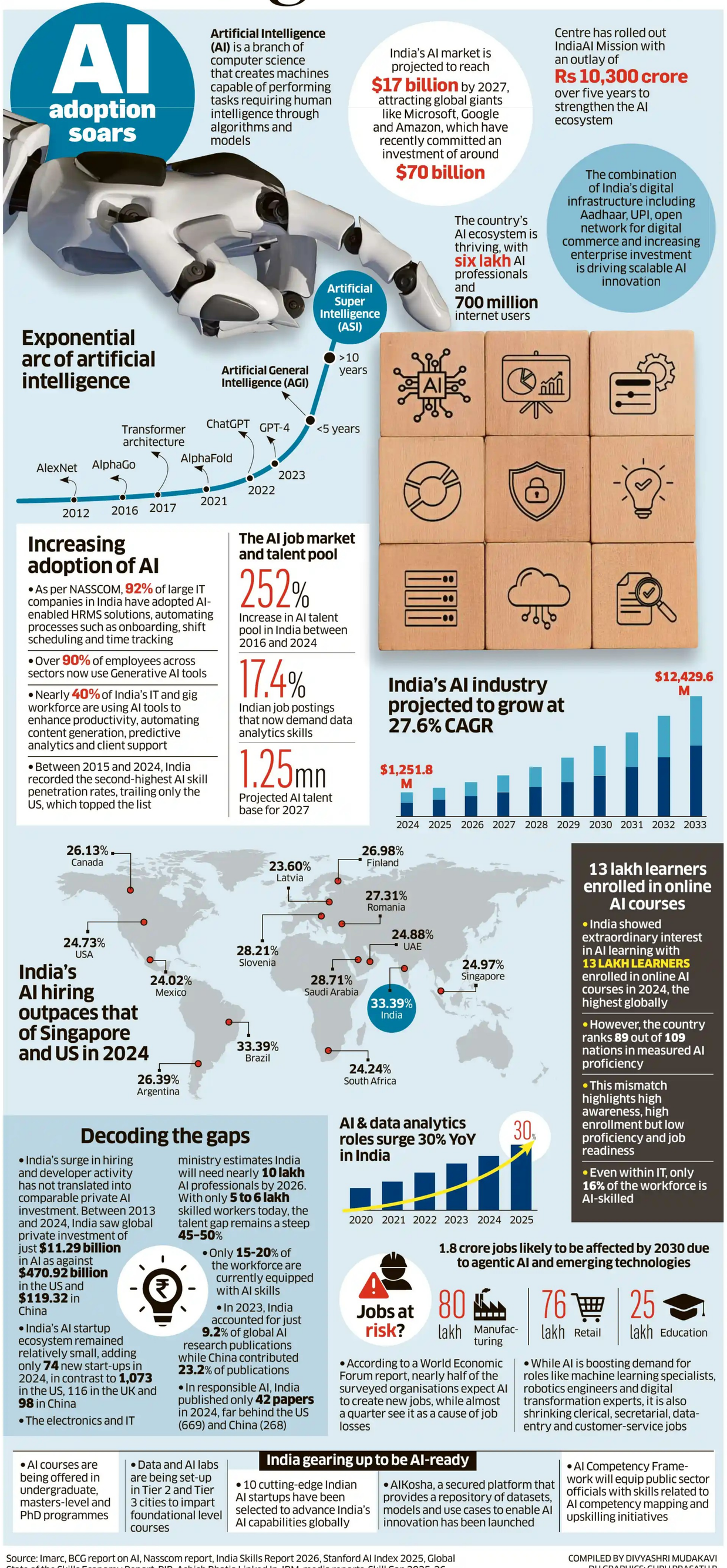
However, global tech companies have announced big investment plans for India. Microsoft earlier this month announced that it will invest $17.5 billion in development of cloud and AI infrastructure in India. Google has pledged $15 billion investment for building a data centre in India while Amazon Web Services has committed $8.3 billion investment.

Sovereign AI model

India aims to develop its indigenous generative artificial intelligence model that can rival OpenAI's ChatGPT and China's DeepSeek. According to Electronics and IT Secretary S Krishnan, the home-grown AI model would be ready by February. It is likely to be unveiled during the AI Impact Summit to be held from February 16-20 in New Delhi. Official sources have indicated that the first sovereign AI model would support over 22 Indian languages.

The generative AI could boost India's GDP by $359-438 billion by 2030, representing a 5.9-7.2% increase. Over seven years, the cumulative impact could reach $1.2-1.5 trillion, adding 0.9-1.1% to annual growth, as per a report released by Ernst & Young last year.

The impact will vary across sectors, with business services, finance, transportation, education, retail and healthcare among those expected to benefit the most.


AI adoption soars
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a branch of computer science that creates machines capable of performing tasks requiring human intelligence through algorithms and models
India's AI market is projected to reach $17 billion by 2027, attracting global giants like Microsoft, Google and Amazon, which have recently committed an investment of around $70 billion
Centre has rolled out IndiaAI Mission with an outlay of Rs 10,300 crore over five years to strengthen the AI ecosystem
The combination of India's digital infrastructure including Aadhaar, UPI, open network for digital commerce and increasing enterprise investment is driving scalable AI innovation
The country's AI ecosystem is thriving, with six lakh AI professionals and 700 million internet users
Exponential arc of artificial intelligence
Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI)
>10 years
Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)
<5 years
Transformer architecture
ChatGPT
GPT-4
AlexNet
AlphaGo
AlphaFold
2012
2016
2017
2021
2022
2023
Increasing adoption of AI
• As per NASSCOM, 92% of large IT companies in India have adopted AI-enabled HRMS solutions, automating processes such as onboarding, shift scheduling and time tracking
• Over 90% of employees across sectors now use Generative AI tools
• Nearly 40% of India's IT and gig workforce are using AI tools to enhance productivity, automating content generation, predictive analytics and client support
• Between 2015 and 2024, India recorded the second-highest AI skill penetration rates, trailing only the US, which topped the list
The AI job market and talent pool
252% Increase in AI talent pool in India between 2016 and 2024
17.4% Indian job postings that now demand data analytics skills
1.25mn Projected AI talent base for 2027
India's AI industry projected to grow at 27.6% CAGR
$1,251.8 M
$12,429.6 M
2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032 2033
India's AI hiring outpaces that of Singapore and US in 2024
26.13% Canada
24.73% USA
24.02% Mexico
26.39% Argentina
33.39% Brazil
23.60% Latvia
26.98% Finland
27.31% Romania
28.21% Slovenia
24.88% UAE
28.71% Saudi Arabia
33.39% India
24.97% Singapore
24.24% South Africa
13 lakh learners enrolled in online AI courses
• India showed extraordinary interest in AI learning with 13 LAKH LEARNERS enrolled in online AI courses in 2024, the highest globally
• However, the country ranks 89 out of 109 nations in measured AI proficiency
• This mismatch highlights high awareness, high enrollment but low proficiency and job readiness
• Even within IT, only 16% of the workforce is AI-skilled
Decoding the gaps
• India's surge in hiring and developer activity has not translated into comparable private AI investment. Between 2013 and 2024, India saw global private investment of just $11.29 billion in AI as against $470.92 billion in the US and $119.32 in China
• India's AI startup ecosystem remained relatively small, adding only 74 new start-ups in 2024, in contrast to 1,073 in the US, 116 in the UK and 98 in China
• The electronics and IT ministry estimates India will need nearly 10 lakh AI professionals by 2026. With only 5 to 6 lakh skilled workers today, the talent gap remains a steep 45–50%
• Only 15-20% of the workforce are currently equipped with AI skills
• In 2023, India accounted for just 9.2% of global AI research publications while China contributed 23.2% of publications
• In responsible AI, India published only 42 papers in 2024, far behind the US (669) and China (268)
AI & data analytics roles surge 30% YoY in India
30%
2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025
1.8 crore jobs likely to be affected by 2030 due to agentic AI and emerging technologies
Jobs at risk?
80 lakh Manufacturing
76 lakh Retail
25 lakh Education
• According to a World Economic Forum report, nearly half of the surveyed organisations expect AI to create new jobs, while almost a quarter see it as a cause of job losses
• While AI is boosting demand for roles like machine learning specialists, robotics engineers and digital transformation experts, it is also shrinking clerical, secretarial, data-entry and customer-service jobs
India gearing up to be AI-ready
• AI courses are being offered in undergraduate, masters-level and PhD programmes
• Data and AI labs are being set-up in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities to impart foundational level courses
• 10 cutting-edge Indian AI startups have been selected to advance India's AI capabilities globally
• AIKosha, a secured platform that provides a repository of datasets, models and use cases to enable AI innovation has been launched
• AI Competency Framework will equip public sector officials with skills related to AI competency mapping and upskilling initiatives

Source: Imarc, BCG report on AI, Nasscom report, India Skills Report 2026, Stanford AI Index 2025, Global State of the Skills Economy Report, PIB, Ashish Bhatia Linked In, IBM, media reports, Skill Gap 2025-26

COMPILED BY DIVYASHRI MUDAKAVI
DH GRAPHICS: GURU PRASATH R

ChatGPT powers India's AI leap

GYANENDRA KESHRI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

OpenAI's ChatGPT, launched in late 2022, has reshaped the artificial intelligence (AI) industry transforming it from a specialised technical domain into a mainstream utility. The Sam Altman-led platform claims to have 80 crore weekly active users worldwide in October, more than double the number recorded at the beginning of the year.

India has emerged as ChatGPT's largest user base, with at least one in every eight users coming from the country. Since its launch, ChatGPT has recorded over 11 crore downloads in India, significantly ahead of the nearly 8 crore downloads in the US.

The platform's impact is being felt across sectors, including software, retail, financial services and media.

"Over the past three years, AI—accelerated by platforms like ChatGPT—has fundamentally reshaped service delivery across India's financial ecosystem," said Deepak Aggarwal, co-founder of Moneyboxx Finance Limited.

"Earlier, AI was largely limited to basic automation and conventional scoring models. Today, it acts as an intelligent decision-making engine, strengthening underwriting, improving risk assessment, enhancing customer service and boosting operational efficiency."

Aggarwal added that the shift from manual, paper-driven systems to real-time, data-led processes has reduced turnaround times and improved access for underserved borrowers.

Rise in just three years

For years, Google dominated web search, remaining the backbone of the online information ecosystem. While it continues to hold that position, ChatGPT has captured a significant share of user attention in just three years.

OpenAI, founded as a non-profit research organisation in 2015, introduced its Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) models in 2018. GPT-3, launched in 2020, forms the core AI model behind ChatGPT introduced in late 2022.

Trained on vast amounts of internet text, ChatGPT can answer questions, explain complex concepts, generate articles, emails, poems and stories, write code and transcribe, translate and summarise long texts. According to an OpenAI survey released earlier this month, ChatGPT Enterprise users save an average of 40–60 minutes a day.

50% of users are students

Nearly half of ChatGPT users in India are students. To expand its reach among them, OpenAI recently announced the "Chats for Students in India" initiative and made its ChatGPT Go plan free for Indian users for one year starting November 4, 2025. These initiatives are likely to further boost its user base in the country.

Have your say

To express your opinion, e-mail us at: insight@deccanherald.co.in

Research & development, from Page 1

Growth hinges on research and innovation

In this context, academia often views industry as an outside contractor, while business houses use research laboratories primarily to test and calibrate equipment or to try out new technologies to see if they are economically viable.

Over the years, industry has not invested sufficiently in R&D or shared the risk, unlike in the USA where major companies like Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and General Dynamics are part of research programmes from the R&D stage itself. Many Indian companies argue that R&D agencies offer little benefit to their business, promise much but deliver too little and almost never deliver on time. This has contributed to a lack of trust between academia and industry.

Short-term ties

Insiders point to a weak research culture in the majority of Indian business establishments, with only a few sectors such as chemicals and pharmaceuticals showing stronger engagement. The industry often finds bureaucratic procedures governing R&D too complex for the profit-oriented private sector. As a result, companies prefer short-term ties with academia that avoid risk, or they set up their own units for specific tasks.

A recent study on R&D data of the top 1,000 listed companies offers a snapshot of the current reality. Commissioned by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA), the study includes data from 912 companies that reported their R&D expenditure for two consecutive fiscal years: FY22 and FY23. Of the 70 PSUs and 842 private companies that participated, only about 50% — 36 PSUs and 427 private companies — reported any R&D spending.

Companies in the defence, pharmaceuticals and automobile sectors recorded the highest R&D expenditure as a percentage of turnover, while six sectors, including civil aviation, financial services and e-platform products and services, reported no R&D investment. Although banking, insurance, finance and non-banking financial companies account for a large share of overall corporate turnover, their contribution to R&D spending is negligible. Other sectors with minimal R&D investment include leather and textile, power, oil and natural gas, plastics, and mining and metal extraction.

A closer look shows that the top three sectors are investing more in R&D to maintain their competitive edge and support plans for expanding their market presence.

The top 20 companies account for approximately 71% of the total R&D expenditure, with the top 10 firms contributing 58%. A majority of Indian companies, including many successful ones, remain either outside the R&D ecosystem or on its margins. There are very few industry-funded PhD programmes outside the Indian Institutes of Technology and similar institutions.

Companies say they need incentives such as tax breaks and financial subsidies to participate in R&D, which would lower the risk factor. They also seek an equivalent of the USA's Bayh-Dole Act, which allows contractors to own inventions arising from federally funded research. Under this US law, universities, nonprofits and small businesses can own, patent and commercialise innovations that are then licensed to industry for manufacturing. The PSA report notes this industry demand but stops short of recommending it.

Incentives

Instead, it recommends standardising the definition of R&D, continuing tax breaks and introducing additional incentives at both the input and output stages, establishing a mandatory R&D web portal and formulating a policy for mandatory disclosure of R&D expenses.

The second part of the wish list — removal of red tape — has also not been met. The new financial rules are the latest example. A few months ago, Union Science Minister Jitendra Singh said in Parliament, "These (fund flow mechanism) transitions during the last three years led to some difficulties in disbursement of grants." In the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the non-payment of royalties in industry-funded research and consultancies has remained an unresolved issue for years. Mandatory scientific procurement via the government's e-marketplace is yet another example of bureaucracy stifling research.

Finally, good-quality research in laboratories is carried out by motivated young scientists who must be adequately compensated. This is an area where the Indian R&D system has been faltering for years. Fellowships from agencies like DST and University Grants Commission (which offer 11,750 JRF slots each year) often do not reach students on time, with most receiving support intermittently. Moreover, there are several thousand non-NET scholars pursuing MPhil or PhD programmes. In 2023-24, the number of such students who did not qualify the National Eligibility Test (NET) but continued their higher studies was 14,829. They receive a monthly stipend of Rs 8,000 and this amount has remained unchanged since 2012.

Without urgent and meaningful reforms to strengthen research funding and streamline bureaucratic obstacles, India risks undermining its innovation potential.

BJP wrests Kerala capital from Left in local body polls

End of 45-year-long rule of LDF in Thiruvananthapuram; Modi calls it 'watershed moment'

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

BJP workers celebrate during the counting of votes for the local body elections, in Thiruvananthapuram, on Saturday. PTI

The BJP on Saturday received a major impetus in Kerala ahead of next year's Assembly polls with a resounding victory in the local body elections in the Thiruvananthapuram city corporation, ending the 45-year-long reign of the Left Democratic Front.

In what Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed as a "watershed moment" in the state's politics, the BJP-led NDA bagged 50 out of the 101 wards in the city, confining the incumbent CPM-led LDF to 29 seats and the Congress-led United Democratic Front to 19 seats. Two independent candidates also won the polls. Election to one ward was postponed following the death of a candidate.

The saffron alliance is just one seat shy of a simple majority, which, its leaders believe, won't pose any problem.

Kerala went to three-tier local body elections in two phases, the results of which were announced on Saturday.

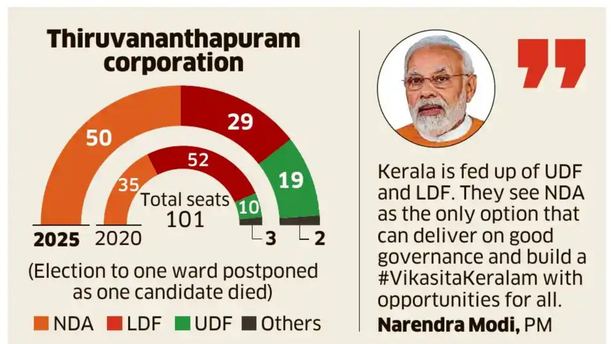
Termed as the "semi-finals" before the Assembly polls, the local body results saw the UDF making a decisive comeback.

Underlining the importance of the victory in Thiruvananthapuram city for the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to social media to congratulate party workers for the "spectacular results".

"Kerala is fed up of UDF and LDF. They see NDA as the only option that can deliver on good governance and build a #VikasitaKeralam with opportunities for all," Modi posted on X.

Thiruvananthapuram MP and Congress leader Shashi Tharoor termed the local body elections results as the "beauty of democracy".

▸ Polls, Page 6



Kerala is fed up of UDF and LDF. They see NDA as the only option that can deliver on good governance and build a #VikasitaKeralam with opportunities for all.
Narendra Modi, PM

The people's verdict must be respected...I campaigned for a change from 45 years of LDF misrule, but the voters have ultimately rewarded another party that also sought a clear change in governance.
Shashi Tharoor, Thiruvananthapuram MP

The election result served as a warning that greater vigilance was required to ensure that people did not fall prey to the misinformation and divisive tactics of communal forces.
Pinarayi Vijayan, Kerala CM

20 US states sue to block high fee for H-1B visas

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, AGENCIES: The attorneys general of 20 states, including California and New York, have sued the Trump administration Friday over its decision to impose a $100,000 fee on new H-1B visas for skilled foreign workers.

President Donald Trump signed a proclamation in September imposing the fee. His administration has argued that some employers had abused the program to keep wages low, hurting American workers.

The states have asked a federal court to declare the policy unlawful and to block its enforcement.

California and Massachusetts were the lead plaintiffs in the suit, which was filed Friday in the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts. California-based tech companies, including Meta, Google and Apple, were among the largest employers of H-1B visa holders this year.

Move against Trump's India tariffs

Three influential US lawmakers have introduced a resolution in Congress aimed at ending the tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on India, terming it as a counterproductive approach that "weakens a critical partnership". The resolution was introduced on Friday in the House of Representatives.

Details on Page 9

2nd airport: Tenders floated for feasibility study of sites

Location will be finalised after in-depth study by consultant

ASRA MAVAD
BENGALURU, DHNS

The plan for a second airport in Bengaluru has been set in motion with the Karnataka State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (KSIIDC) floating a tender inviting consultants to prepare a detailed strategic and technical site feasibility report for the three shortlisted locations.

The Airports Authority of India has only done a preliminary assessment of the shortlisted locations, said Industries Minister M B Patil.

"Based on their preliminary assessment, we are getting an in-depth multi-disciplinary feasibility study done. Based on this, we'll choose the location on merit. This is the first of the two main tenders which will go out for the airport," Patil told *DH*.

> Based on their (AAI) preliminary assessment, we are getting an in-depth multi-disciplinary feasibility study done. Based on this, we'll choose the location on merit. This is the first of the two main tenders which will go out for the airport.
>
> **M B Patil,** Industries Minister

The feasibility report will play a key role in finalising the airport's location. Among the three shortlisted sites, two are near Kanakapura Road and one near Tumakuru Road.

The locations near Kanakapura Road are adjacent and also have overlapping land areas. As a part of the feasibility study, these will be evaluated individually, as well as jointly, to "assess their potential as a combined site".

"KSIIDC has also kept the option open to add another site for evaluation during the course of the assignment, subject to mutually agreed timelines and costs," stated the Request for Proposal (RFP).

▸ Second airport, Page 6

Hosur airport: 2.9k acres to be acquired, Page 8

Who is eligible?

Firms that have executed projects worth at least Rs 250 crore annually over the past five years, and have handled or prepared consultancy reports for a minimum of five projects in the relevant sector, will be eligible to participate in the tender.

Time period

The consultant will have approximately 8.5 months from the date of commencement to submit the Strategic & Technical Site Feasibility Report. Once the study is in and location is finalised, the tender for the airport's design will be floated.

Aland vote theft: BJP's Guttedar, son named prime accused

KALABURAGI, DHNS: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the Aland voter fraud case in Kalaburagi district has named former BJP MLA Subhas Guttedar and his son Harshanand as accused A-1 and A-2 respectively.

The SIT filed a charge-sheet against a total of seven people including Guttedar and his son in the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) court in Bengaluru on Friday.

Subhash Guttedar

The SIT has accused the BJP leader and his son of attempting to delete the names of 5,994 voters from the Aland voters' list before the 2023 Assembly elections. Guttedar, a four-time MLA, had defeated B R Patil by a slender margin of 697 votes in 2018. Later, Patil wrested the seat back in the 2023 polls by 9,348 votes.

Details on Page 5

'ICT3 launch delay caused Rs 109-cr loss'

BENGALURU, DHNS

Delay in implementing the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Phase 3, a major project, at government and aided schools by the department of school education and literacy, has led to a financial loss of Rs 109 crore to the government.

The Public Accounts Committee, headed by senior legislator C C Patil, has expressed displeasure over the way the school education department handled the project and stated, "Delay in implementing the project resulted in locking up of government funds and cost overruns."

The committee, in its report placed before both the houses in the ongoing winter session, stated that despite objections raised by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India about the department's inefficiency in implementing the project, the department took 10 years to appoint an inquiry officer.

"Though the case was brought to light in 2013-14, the department constituted an inquiry commission only in 2023. The committee has taken this delay by the department seriously," reads the report.

Meanwhile, the committee submitted the report on November 2023 and held the then principal of DIET Bengaluru Urban responsible for the delay in implementing ICT 3 while he was working as special officer of the department and also as the Under Secretary to the Department in 2010 -11.

Following the report, the department even constituted another committee headed by retired district and sessions judge S S Sarang Mutt as special investigating officer. The report is expected to be out.

Interestingly, the department cannot initiate action against some officials though their involvement is proven as they have retired from service.

▸ ICT3, Page 6

At Rs 3.31 cr, probe in Prajwal case costliest of all SITs

BENGALURU, DHNS: The government has so far spent Rs 4.54 crore on four of seven Special Investigation Teams (SIT) it formed since coming to power, and over two-thirds of the expense went into investigating sexual crimes by former MP Prajwal Revanna.

After coming to power in May 2023, the government formed SITs to probe the Bitcoin scam, corruption in recruitment of sub-inspectors (PSI), allegations against Prajwal, embezzlement at Maharshi Valmiki ST Development Corporation, allegations of sexual assault by BJP MLA Muniratna, claims of mass burials at Dharmasthala and the Aland voter fraud.

The home department states no expenses have been incurred so far on PSI, Dharmasthala and Aland SITs.

Of the Rs 4.54 crore spent on four SITs, the costliest has been the one on Prajwal, the former Hassan MP who has been convicted in the first of four cases against him. The government has spent Rs 3.31 crore on Prajwal's case, especially prosecution.

Former advocate-general Ravivarma Kumar, a special public prosecutor in the Prajwal case, was paid Rs 2.41 crore in fees, according to information placed in the Assembly by Home Minister G Parameshwara. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal was paid a fee of Rs 15.5 lakh for a single appearance. The government paid Rs 41.07 lakh to advocates B N Jagadeesha and Ashok N Nayak in the Prajwal case.

PROBE BILL

SIT	Cost
Bitcoin	Rs 69,73,068
Prajwal	Rs 3,31,49,355
ST Corp	Rs 8,83,818
Muniratna	Rs 44,60,864
TOTAL	**Rs 4,54,67,105**

Cost includes legal fees
SOURCE: HOME DEPARTMENT

The SIT has filed charge sheets in five out of six cases connected to Prajwal.

Coming second is the Bitcoin scam, whose probe and legal fees have cost Rs 69.73 lakh. In nine cases, the SIT has completed its probe and charge sheets in seven. In the remaining two cases, the SIT has sought the government's sanction for prosecution.

Six cases against Raja Rajeshwarinagar MLA Munirathna have cost Rs 44.60 lakh. Investigators filed a 'B' report in three cases. In two cases, charge sheets have been submitted to the court. Probe is on in one case.

CAPITAL CHOKES

Smog engulfs Kartavya Path near the India Gate in New Delhi on Saturday. The air quality index neared the "severe plus" mark, forcing authorities to invoke the most stringent set of anti-pollution emergency measures. PTI

Dedicated quantum task force by Dec-end

BENGALURU, DHNS: A dedicated task force to helm Karnataka's ambitious Quantum Mission will be operational by the end of December, said Science and Technology Minister N S Boseraju.

With multiple business giants as well as startups reaching out to the state government regarding the upcoming Q-city project, "it is time for the task force to kickstart operations as early as possible," Boseraju told *DH*.

"Once the Belagavi session wraps up, we will set the task force into motion and formally announce it by year-end. I want it to be a dedicated vision group, with representation from all sectors. There needs to be people with scientific knowledge, and also experts who can work as the middlemen between the government and entrepreneurs. We are bringing in people from across the country," he added.

Details on Page 6

Messi event turns messy, crowd vandalises stadium

ARKADEV GHOSHAL
KOLKATA, DHNS

Chaos reigned at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata on Saturday as angry spectators took to the field to vandalise infrastructure after football legend Lionel Messi left the venue much earlier than expected.

The local police eventually brought the worsening law-and-order situation under control, and even arrested the main organiser of the event.

As the development snowballed into a political row, West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee apologised to Messi in a post on X, and also said a panel had been set up to probe what went wrong.

Fans paid thousands of rupees to attend what was billed as a marquee event — some even more as they travelled from other states — and appeared to be happy when the World Cup-winning retired Argentine captain arrived at the stadium, formally called the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan, at 11.30 am.

He was expected to take a lap of the stadium and greet fans. And he began doing so, but the spectators would later say that he was almost lost in the crowd of policemen, private security personnel and politicians. However, he did not complete that lap, leaving with his retinue just 10-15 minutes after he arrived.

▸ Messi, Page 6

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- Messi leaves Kolkata stadium event after just 10-15 minutes
- Fans express disappointment in conversation with *DH*, say Messi was hardly visible

- Angry fans vandalise the venue; cops resort to mild force to bring the situation under control
- Police detain, then arrest main organiser **Satadru Datta**; FIR registered
- West Bengal CM **Mamata Banerjee** sets up panel to probe incident
- Bengal BJP chief **Suvendu Adhikari** urges Governor **C V Ananda Bose** to set up 'truly independent' enquiry panel
- AIFF distances itself from incident, says it was a private event organised by a **PR agency**

Security personnel clash with angry football fans at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata on Saturday. REUTERS

FISH FORAY

State plans 100-acre aqua park to promote fishing, allied activities

DH SPECIAL

SNEHA RAMESH
BENGALURU, DHNS

Karnataka may soon get its first aqua park to promote fishing and allied activities. The integrated park will be spread across 100 acres and will include a host of facilities including sports fishing, fish farming and storage facilities.

"The aqua park is a concept by the Central Ministry of Fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying. According to the specification from the department, the aqua parks are expected to act as hubs to promote fishing with end-to-end infrastructure from seed to feed to processing to market access," explained a senior official from the Karnataka fisheries department.

Aqua attractions

- Farming of fish food
- Fish farming
- Cold processing units
- Develop ornamental fish for aquariums
- Well-equipped market
- Sports fishing

According to the plan, the aqua park will include nine major facilities like farming of fish food, generating of fish seeds, development of fish seeds, fish farming, cold processing units, development of ornamental fish for aquariums, well-equipped market, fish transport facilities, and sports fishing.

Sports fishing usually refers to fishing for pleasure and includes fishing competitions and challenges -- for recreation.

The fisheries department has shortlisted three locations for the park – Byndoor in Udupi, Malavalli in Mandya and Almatti in Bijapur. Based on the availability of land, one location will be finalised and a DPR would be sent to the Union government for approval.

"We have received proposals for three locations. All of them have water bodies close by and hence there is a demand for fishing. However, space is the main criteria. If we are able to get 100 acres, we will go ahead and prepare a detailed project report (DPR) to be submitted to the central ministry," said Dinesh Kumar Kaller, director, Karnataka fisheries department.

At Malavalli, close to Gaganachukki, the department has identified 75 acres of land and written to the revenue department.

"The revenue department has said that the land belongs to the forest department and talks are on. We are also looking at other locations," Kaller added.

So far, only 11 states have an aqua park approved under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) and Karnataka is confident that its proposal would also be accepted soon.

SC in BMW hit-and-run case: These boys need to be taught a lesson

NEW DELHI, DHNS: The Supreme Court has declined to consider the bail application of Mihir Shah, the son of a former Shiv Sena leader, in the 2024 Mumbai BMW hit-and-run case, saying "these boys need to be taught a lesson".

The court noted the accused belonged to an affluent family and his father was associated with Deputy CM Eknath Shinde's party. "He parks his Mercedes in the shed, takes out his BMW and crashes it and goes absconding. Let him be inside for some time. These boys need to be taught a lesson," the bench observed.

Senior advocate Rebecca John, appearing for Shah, said the HC allowed him to seek bail. However, she sought permission to withdraw the plea.

Details on Page 7

Clampdown in Bangladesh

DHAKA, PTI: Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus-led interim government on Saturday ordered a nationwide security clampdown as fresh unrest gripped the country following the shooting of a right-wing cultural group's youth leader. Page 9

Vlogger files complaint over AI-generated obscene video

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 28-year-old city-based vlogger with over 1.2 million followers has filed a police complaint after an AI-generated obscene video, allegedly morphed (using his face), was circulated on X (formerly Twitter), causing him mental distress.

A senior police officer said Hennur police have registered an FIR. The complainant, a resident of Horamavu, alleged that on December 10 at around 9.59 pm he came across a video online that falsely depicted him in an obscene manner. He stated that the video was created using artificial intelligence and that he does not appear in the video in any form. The vlogger said the video was shared from an X account with the username Madhan (@Madhan1974902).

"The complainant started receiving multiple calls and messages questioning the authenticity of the video, which led to severe mental harassment. Given his public profile, the circulation of such content has affected his dignity and personal safety," the officer said.

Police said they are probing the social media account mentioned in the complaint and are working to trace the origin of the video.

Landlord, son booked for unleashing dog on two men after quarrel

Cases registered under BNS, SC/ST Act

MANJUNATH SHETTAR
BENGALURU, DHNS

A landlord and his son have been booked after they allegedly set their pet dog, a pitbull, on two men belonging to the Scheduled Castes during a quarrel outside a bakery in Subramanyapura on Thursday evening, leaving both victims injured.

The accused are Shivarudrappa (52), owner of the property where the bakery functions and his son Adithya (31), who works in a private company.

DH SPECIAL

Police have registered cases under various sections of the BNS, including assault, criminal intimidation and using an animal to cause injury, besides provisions of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Police said the incident occurred at Arehalli at around 7.50 pm, when Lokesh (50), an auto driver, and his acquaintance Manohar, a painter, had stopped to have tea at a bakery adjacent to Shivarudrappa's house.

Shivarudrappa allegedly objected to their presence near his house and abused them using caste-based slurs, claiming they should not loiter in the area.

When the victims questioned his behaviour, the argument escalated. At this point, Adithya allegedly joined his father and the duo deliberately unleashed their pet pitbull on the two men.

The dog bit Lokesh on his knee and injured Manohar on his stomach, police said.

Shivarudrappa allegedly threatened the victims with dire consequences during the altercation. Passersby alerted the police, following which the injured duo were rushed to hospital. They were treated for injuries and discharged later. Both victims were administered anti-rabies vaccination on Friday.

A senior police officer from Subramanyapura station said the accused were taken into custody soon after the FIR was registered and the case was being investigated at a senior level as it involves provisions of SC/ST Act.

Lokesh told *DH* that Shivarudrappa and his son had been harbouring animosity towards members of his community for a while.

"They often abuse us and try to restrict people from our community from coming to the area," he said.

Police said action will be taken after recording statements of witnesses and examining CCTV footage.

Pitbull among 'ferocious & dangerous' breeds

Supriya H B, member of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals told DH, "Pitbulls are among 23 dog breeds classified as ferocious and dangerous by the union ministry of fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying in March 2024 to promote responsible pet ownership. However, the High Court stayed the Centre's circular in the state, allowing breeding and sale of these dogs to continue.

Animal welfare groups say irresponsible breeding and abandonment often leave such dogs on the streets, where lack of food and shelter can trigger aggressive behaviour. They have urged the government to frame clear regulations, noting that several countries had restricted ownership of aggressive breeds in the interest of public safety and animal welfare.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the General Public that, we are investigating the title in respect of lands in all measuring 4 acres 12.36 guntas all situated at Amruthahalli Village, Yelahanka Hobli, Yelahanka Taluk, Bangalore urban district, Bangalore, morefully set out in the Item No.1 to 10 table below and hereinafter referred to as "Schedule Property" of the respective Owners mentioned herein below ("Owners").

Any person/s having objection/s to the above mentioned transaction or any person/s claiming to have any manner of right, title, interest, claim or demand in relation the Owners or the Schedule Property or any part thereof, may lodge his/her/their statement/s, objection/s and/or claim/s in writing, along with documentary evidence in support thereof, with the undersigned, within 15 (Fifteen) days from the date of publication of this notice. In the absence of any genuine and/or rightful objections and/or claims, we will issue our report on title in respect of the Schedule Property and our client will proceed to finalize and conclude the Proposed Transaction of the Schedule Property, as if no claim/s or objection/s exist and that they have been consciously waived and abandoned by such person/s.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

All that piece and parcel of lands measuring 4 Acres 12.36 Guntas situated at Amruthahalli Village, Yelahanka Hobli, Yelahanka Taluk, Bengaluru urban district Bengaluru, comprising of Item Nos. 1 to 10 as detailed with the boundaries as under;

Item No.	Survey Number	Extent Acre	Extent Guntas	Name of the Owners	Boundaries East by	Boundaries West by	Boundaries North by	Boundaries South by
01	106/1	0	4.5	NBD office Park LLP and Mrs Prema	Land in Sy.No 106/10	Land in Sy.No. 106/10	Land in Sy.No. 106/10	Land in Sy.No. 106/13 & 106/6
02	106/10	0	20.13	NBD office Park LLP and Mrs Prema	Land in Sy.No. 106/2	Bellary Road (NH-7)	Land in Sy.No. 106/11	Land in Sy.No. 106/1 & Sy.No. 106/6
03	106/11	0	14.94	NBD office Park LLP and Mr BK Vinod Kumar	Land in Sy.No. 106/2	Bellary Road (NH-7)	Land in Sy.No. 106/12	Land in Sy.No. 106/10
04	106/12	0	14.94	NBD office Park LLP and MR BK Harsha	Land in Sy.No. 106/2	Bellary Road (NH-7)	Land in Sy.No. 107/8,107 /6108/2 & 108/1	Land in Sy.No. 106/11
05	106/2	1	28	CV Projects Private Limited	Land in Sy.No. 106/3	Land in Sy.No. 106/10, 106/11 & 106/12	Land in Sy.No. 108/1	Land in Sy.No. 106/6
06	108/2	0	10	Citrus Ventures Pvt Ltd	Land in Sy.No. 108/1	Land in Sy.No. 107/6 & 107/7	Land in Sy.No. 108/1	Land in Sy.No. 106/12
07	107/5	0	17	Citrus Ventures	Land in Sy.No. 107/6	Land in Sy.No. 107/4	Land in Sy.No. 107/3	Land in Sy.No. 107/8
08	107/6	0	16	Citrus Ventures Pvt Ltd	Land in Sy.No. 107/7 & 108/2	Land in Sy.No. 107/5	Land in Sy.No. 107/3	Land in Sy.No. 106/12
9	107/7	0	6	Citrus Ventures Pvt Ltd	Land in Sy.No. 108/2	Land in Sy.No. 107/6	Land in Sy.No. 107/3	Land in Sy.No. 108/2
10	107/8	0	3.75	Citrus Ventures Pvt Ltd	Land in Sy.No. 106/12	Bellary Road (NH-7)	Land in Sy.No. 107/4 & 107/5	Land in Sy.No. 106/12
TOTAL		4	12.36					

Date: 13.12.2025
Place: Bengaluru

Gerald Manoharan, Partner, JSA, Advocates, 18th Floor, SKAV 909, No. 9/1, Residency Road, Richmond Circle, Bengaluru – 560 001. Ph. 080-43503600/080-43503610, E-mail – gerald@jsalaw.com

Ministry of Culture Government of India VISVESVARAYA INDUSTRIAL & TECHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM

(A unit of National Council of Science Museums)
Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, P.B No.: 5216, Kasturba Road, Bengaluru – 560 001, Telephone- 080–2286 6200, Fax: 080-22864009/22864119,
E-mail: vitmuseum@gmail.com Website: https://www.vismuseum.gov.in/

Engagement of Young Professionals in the field of Public Relations(Advt. No.14/2025)

A Walk-in Test/Interview is scheduled at 10.00 am on 05.01.2026 for the engagement **of Young Professionals in the field of Public Relations purely on contract basis at Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum (VITM), Bangalore**. The initial engagement will be for one year, which may be extended for another year based on the satisfactory performance of the incumbent. **Interested candidates should present at VITM Bengaluru with original documents at 10.00 am on 05.01.2026**. For further details visit the website **www.vismuseum.gov.in**

SOUTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE FOR THE SUPPLY OF STORES NO E-27/2025

THE FOLLOWING E-TENDERS/ CORRIGENDA ARE PUBLISHED IN IREPS WEBSITE. FIRMS ARE REQUESTED TO LOGIN TO http://www.ireps.gov.in-login>e.tender-goods & services (new) AND QUOTE AGAINST THESE TENDERS. MANUAL QUOTATIONS WILL NOT BE ENTERTAINED FOR THESE TENDERS. CLOSING TIME FOR ALL TENDERS 14:30 HOURS.

SL NO	TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	DUE DATE	QUANTITY
1	03255644	RC FOR MANUFACTURE AND SUPPLY OF 10MM THICK NYLON CORD	30/12/2025	1000 SETS
2	44250015B	STRIKER CASTING WEAR PLATE	02/01/2026	24701 NOS
3	78256429A	495-4A QUICK DRAW FOR BLC WAGON	02/01/2026	104 NOS
4	78256440	SUPPLY,INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF RETRO FITMENT OF REVISED WSP WIRING	06/01/2026	200 SETS
5	11250590A	RECTIFIER-CUM-REGULATING UNIT	07/01/2026	37 NOS
6	29252890	SUPPLY OF MODULE, CIRCUIT - PSM 312	07/01/2026	25 NOS
7	06254308A	SOFT BLANKET	08/01/2026	43174 NOS
8	26251245	PANTOGRAPH COMPLETE	08/01/2026	87 NOS
9	82245450A	UN-INSULATED CADMIUM COPPER CATENARY WIRE	08/01/2026	84018.06 KGS
10	03255650	RC FOR MANUFACTURING & SUPPLY OF 1 IN 12 WELDABLE CMS CROSSING	09/01/2026	1000 SETS
11	68255982	CONTROLLER ASSEMBLY, DYNAMIC BRAKE	09/01/2026	43 NOS
12	26251071A	SET OF DAMPERS FOR WAP7	12/01/2026	56 SETS
13	78256428	WIDE JAW ADAPTER	20/01/2026	3600 NOS
14	91256282	UNINSULATED CADMIUM COPPER CATENARY WIRE	19/01/2026	12 MT
15	91256278	JOINTLESS GROOVED COPPER CONTACT WIRE	19/01/2026	14 MT
16	78256596	COUPLER BODY WITH SHANK WEAR PLATE	30/01/2026	1700 NOS

THE FOLLOWING CORRIGENDA ARE PUBLISHED IN IREPS WEBSITE. FIRMS ARE REQUESTED TO LOGIN TO http://www.ireps.gov.in-login> e.tender-goods&services (NEW) FOR DETAILS:

CORRIGENDUM TO TENDER NOTICE NO.E-24/2025, SL.NO.16, TENDER NO. 06251005, ITEM:FURNACE OIL

COMMERCIAL-COMPLIANCE: PRICE VARIATION CLAUSE	EXISTING: NIL	**READ AS: PVC APPLICABLE**
FIELD NAME: TENDER CLOSING DATE & TIME	EXISTING: 10/12/2025 14:30	**READ AS: 22/12/2025 14:30**

CORRIGENDUM TO TENDER NOTICE NO.E-25/2025, SL.NO. 18, TENDER NO. 16255018, ITEM: UNIVERSAL AXLE JOURNAL TURNING AND BURNISHING LATHE

FIELD NAME: TENDER CLOSING DATE & TIME	EXISTING: 24/12/2025 14:30	**READ AS: 05/01/2026 14:30**
DELETIONS- DOCUMENTS: 1. Bid Document Part 1 (i) 2. Annexure for Bid Document Part 2 3. Bid Document Part 1 (ii)		**ADDITIONS- DOCUMENTS: 1. Bid Document Part1 2. Annexure for Bid Document Part 2**

PRINCIPAL CHIEF MATERIALS MANAGER

CENTRAL RAILWAY

SOLAPUR DIVISION

SIGNALLING WORK

DRM (S&T)'s Office, Central Railway, Solapur for and on behalf of President of India invites online e-tenders on Railway's e-procurement website **www.ireps.gov.in** from the capable, reputed firms/Contractors for the following works:- **Name of work with its locality:** Signalling work in connection with BCM work with Geogrid and Geo-Textile method (TFTR) & (TBR) in Solapur Division of Central Railway. **Tender No.:** SUR-N-T-2025-26-31 **Approximate Cost of the Work:** Rs.82,68,713.84 **Cost of the tender form:** NIL **Earnest money to be deposited:** Rs. 1,65,400 **Completion period of the work:** 12 Months **Date & Time of Closing of tender:** 05.01.2026 after 15.30 Hrs. The details are available in ireps website. Corrigendum/ amendments if any will be uploaded only on above e-procurement website. Only online tenders will be accepted. Manual/ postal/e-mail, FAX, by hand tenders will not be accepted. Bidders are requested to obtain Class III Digital Signature Certificate with company name and register the same with **www.ireps.gov.in.** The Payment of Earnest Money (EMD) will be accepted through net banking or payment gateway or in the form of Bank Guarantee and the original Bank Guarantee should be delivered in person to the official nominated as indicated in the tender document before closing date for submission of bids (i.e. excluding the last date of submission of bids) For further details please visit **www.ireps.gov.in**.

DRM S&T Branch, C.R. Solapur

Apex-088

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The General Public is hereby put to Notice that, **MECH INDUSTRIES (P) LTD.,** Represented by its **Chairman / M.D Mr.PANKAJ GARG,** S/o.Sri R.S Agarwal, residing at No.43/1, Kothnur Dinne, B.K Circle, Uttarahalli Hobli, Bangalore – 560076, represents that it is the absolute owner of the below mentioned Schedule Property and my client intends to purchase the Schedule Property from the aforesaid owner.

Any person having any right, title, claim or interest in the Schedule Property must notify the undersigned with documentary proof thereof within Seven (07) days of this publication. In case no such notice is received by us within Seven (07) days from the date of publication of this notice, it shall be presumed that the title of the aforesaid owner with respect to the Schedule Property is clear, marketable and free from encumbrance/s of any kind whatsoever and no person has any right, title or interest of any nature whatsoever in respect of the Schedule Property or any part thereof. Claims or alleged interest, if any, which are not received within Seven (07) days from the date of publication of this notice shall be deemed to have been waived and disregarded for all intents and purposes and shall not be binding on my client.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

Item No.1: All that piece and parcel of Property bearing No.30, old Katha No.10/3, New Bommanahalli CMC Katha No.320, Property No.30/10/3, measuring East to West 80 feet and North to South 50 feet, in all measuring 4000 Sq feet, situated at Kothanuru Village, Uttarahalli Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, Bangalore District and bounded on: **East by :** Private Property; **West by :** Road; **North by :** Property No.29; **South by :** Property No.31.

Item No.2: All that piece and parcel of Property bearing No.29, old Katha No.10/3, New Bommanahalli CMC Katha No.182, Property No.29/10/3, measuring East to West 80 feet and North to South 50 feet, in all measuring 4000 Sq feet, situated at Kothanuru Village, Uttarahalli Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, Bangalore District and bounded on:- **East by** : Private Property; **West by :** Road; **North by :** Property No.28; **South by :** Property No.30.

G.V.Sudhakar, Advocate
No.346, New No.35, 12th Cross, 7th Main,
2nd Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore – 560 011.

Citizen Forum launches decentralised composting unit in HSR Layout

BENGALURU, DHNS: The decentralised block-level composting facility, which was inaugurated on Saturday, in Sector 7 of HSR Layout in Bengaluru could well show the way on how communities can manage waste locally.

An initiative of the HSR Citizen Forum (HCF), the primary objective behind the establishment of the composting unit is to significantly reduce the neighbourhood's contribution to the landfills and foster a closed-loop system for wet waste.

The project, located at Block B, Sector 7, was formally unveiled by Bommannahalli MLA M Satish Reddy, who lauded the HCF's role in setting up the unit. HSR Layout would serve as an example as to how residential areas could be managed, said Reddy, expressing his unstinting support for sustainability initiatives.

The composting facility in Sector 7, HSR Layout, was unveiled .by M Satish Reddy, MLA of Bommanahalli, on Saturday.. PHOTO: HSR CITIZEN FORUM

The unit, set up with funds received from the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) corpus of PVH Arvind, is designed to process wet waste at the source.

"This new facility is a major step toward reducing the daily volume of waste sent to already strained landfills. It actively encourages waste segregation in each household, and will convert organic waste into useful compost, consequently reducing our carbon footprint," observed an HCF member.

The HSR Citizen Forum said that the project is intended to serve as a replicable model for other residential blocks and layouts across Bengaluru, encouraging wider adoption of sustainable Solid Waste Management (SWM) practices.

Key features

- **Landfill intake reduction: Decline in the amount of organic waste dumped at landfills**
- **Responsible segregation: Promotion of scientific waste segregation practices within the locality**
- **Resource generation: Producing valuable, high-quality compost for use in local parks and community gardens, thereby closing the waste loop locally**

The event was attended by Karee Gowda CEO, BSWML, Ramesh K N Commissioner, Bengaluru South City Corporation, besides residents and representatives from various Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and the Greater Bengaluru Authority.

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WALK - IN INTERVIEW

Walk - In Interview for the following posts on purely Part Time / Contractual basis for the academic Year 2025-26. **Reporting Time : 10.00 a.m.**

DATE	POST
17.12.2025	Education Counsellor & Computer Instructor

For detail of Eligibility, Educational Qualifications and Application Form, kindly log on to the Website of **Kendriya Vidyalaya, Rail Wheel Factory at https://wapyelahanka.kvs.ac.in.** Candidates should report to the **Venue at 10:00 am** for the Interview with Original and a set of Photocopies of all necessary document.

No TA / DA will be paid by the Vidyalaya for Walk-in-Interview

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LOW-VIGIL LANES NO MORE City police write to corpns to instal CCTVs, up surveillance

Flyovers & underpasses: Throwing light on dark alleys of crime

SNEHA RAMESH
BENGALURU, DHNS

The much-talked-about Rs 7.11-crore ATM cash van heist was planned meticulously to ensure that cash transfer happens on Dairy Circle flyover, since the flyover does not have CCTV surveillance.

The Bengaluru city police (BCP) had to depend on and pull out footage from various CCTV cameras before and after the flyover to identify the vehicle used for the robbery and track it down, delaying the investigation.

Of late, CCTV camera footage and mobile phone records and their locations are the first things police turn to for detecting crimes, because they are reliable and undeniable material evidence accepted by even the courts.

In recent years, Bengaluru has emerged as a city with high density of CCTV cameras, catching up with cities like Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad. While the number of cameras installed by BCP is still not very high - 7,500 hitech cameras under safe city project and 9,000 by traffic police - BCP in May this year marked a milestone of geo-tagging over five lakh private CCTV cameras to its mobile crime and criminal tracking network system (MCCTNS). All commercial establishments should instal a CCTV camera facing the road and they should be linked to MCCTNS portal as per the Karnataka Public Safety (Measures) Enforcement Act, 2017.

It is often thought no act on the streets of Bengaluru goes unrecorded. However, the recent ATM cash van heist has exposed the blind spots in the city - its flyovers and underpasses. DH PHOTO

So, it is often thought no act on the streets of Bengaluru goes unrecorded.

However, the recent ATM cash van heist has exposed the blind spots - its flyovers and underpasses.

While government agencies have not installed CCTV cameras on these stretches, most of the cameras of adjoining commercial establishments are also pointed to the street below flyovers or above underpasses. As per recent count, there are 43 flyovers, 28 underpasses in Bengaluru. There are at least five flyovers and underpasses under construction apart from plans to build 17 more.

Following the ATM van heist, these blind spots have become a point of concern for BCP, who have now written to the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), to instal cameras at all flyovers and underpasses.

"We have identified all flyovers and underpasses that have turned out to be blind spots and written to the respective corporations to instal cameras at these places. We are working closely with them to ensure that CCTV coverage improves," said city police commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh.

Focus & alignment

That apart, the police are trying to change the focus and alignment of the existing cameras to point towards the entry and exit points of flyovers and underpasses, so that they have some eyes on the ground.

CCTV surveillance on flyovers provides a number of advantages. Apart from such robberies, many smaller crimes too can be cracked using footage from the cameras.

"On a few flyovers, there are shoulder spaces that can be used for stopping in emergency situations. However, many people, especially youngsters, stop at these points in the late night hours and there have been some instances of crimes and nuisance in such hours. Cameras will help keep a check on them," said a senior police officer.

That apart, wheeling is rampant on flyovers and due to the absence of cameras, the police are only able to book these violators only when they are caught physically.

Given that traffic jams are being reported from flyovers, cameras will help monitor traffic congestion, said Kartik Reddy, joint commissioner (traffic).

"Cameras will help analyse congestion levels and plan necessary alternatives. That apart, it will help us crack down on traffic violations," Reddy said.

The footage will be of great help in case of accidents, Singh noted.

"For instance, if there is a hit and run case, cameras can help us easily crack the case," he said.

Singh said it also helps improve conviction rates since camera footage gives strong evidence that can be presented in court.

"Footage from CCTV cameras is strong evidence for any case. Hence, cameras will help improve conviction rate," he said.

POLICE SEE BIG BENEFITS

CCTV footage helps...

- Monitor situation
- Analyse traffic congestion
- Identify traffic violations
- Is strong evidence in courts

Two men dupe homemaker of 45 grams of gold worth Rs 4.5L

BENGALURU, DHNS: Two unidentified conmen allegedly duped a 45-year-old homemaker and decamped with 48 gm of gold jewellery worth around Rs 4.5 lakh from her house in Malleswaram.

In her complaint, the woman said the two men came to her house at 11.30 am on Thursday on the pretext of seeking donations for a Gurdwara. Her husband was out at work, and she paid them Rs 40.

The men then queried her about problems in family, which they said they could resolve through special rituals. Having earned her trust, they went inside the house and were made to sit in the puja room. One of them asked her to fetch wheat flour from kitchen.

They then asked her to get all gold ornaments. The woman, her suspicions aroused, refused to oblige. But they threatened her with dire consequences if she didn't fall in line. Terrified, she gave them her jewels.

The duo wrapped the jewels inside the flour ball, chanted mantras and covered it with a piece of cloth. They told her to worship the ball for 38 days, warning her not to open it or inform anyone, before leaving.

Among the stolen ornaments was a 30-gm gold necklace, a pair of jhumkas weighing 10 gm, and an 8-gm gold chain, totally valued at around Rs 4.5 lakh. The woman realised she had been cheated when she opened the flour ball around 2 pm. She found the ornaments missing. She rushed to the Malleswaram police station and lodged a complaint. Efforts are on to nab the suspects.

Apartment Bill to protect owners' interests: DKS

'Apartment dwellers account for 19% of city's population'

BENGALURU, DHNS

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday announced that the state government is moving decisively to introduce the Karnataka Apartment Bill 2025, aimed specifically at protecting the interests of apartment owners and residents.

Speaking at a special interaction with apartment residents organised at the Vidhana Soudha, he called for comprehensive feedback to shape the legislation.

"This government stands by apartment owners and residents. We are meeting apartment owners and residents to collect their feedback for the proposed Bill," Shivakumar said.

He urged those who missed the session to submit their suggestions via email to gbasuggesion@gmail.com within the next 10 days.

The move comes against the backdrop of the Karnataka Apartment Ownership Act, 1972, which, according to the deputy chief minister, no successive government has attempted to update despite the massive proliferation of apartment complexes in Bengaluru.

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday announced that the state government is moving decisively to introduce the Karnataka Apartment Bill 2025 during an interaction with apartment residents at the Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru. DH PHOTO/B K JANARDHAN

Shivakumar highlighted that a significant 19% of Bengaluru's population comprises apartment dwellers.

Support sought for election

The interaction, however, took a political turn when Shivakumar sought the apartment community's cooperation in the upcoming Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) elections.

"We are bringing this Bill, which was not brought by the other governments. While we are working for your welfare, we seek your support in the upcoming GBA election," he stated.

He candidly recalled the lack of electoral support from the community in the past, despite the government stepping in to help during the severe borewell crisis that saw 6,000 borewells dry up in the city.

"My brother lost by 1 lakh votes in one constituency during the parliamentary election. Naturally, I felt disappointed at the time," he admitted, yet reaffirmed his commitment to incorporating their suggestions before the Bill is tabled.

He also pointed out the tangible benefits the current government has already delivered, including up to 200 units of free power even to apartments and the provision of an instalment scheme for obtaining water connections for apartment dwellers.

The deputy chief minister noted that the formation of the GBA itself is part of a larger plan to ensure better governance for a city that has grown "too big."

The proposed Bill, once drafted with public input and discussed with MLAs, is expected to be a comprehensive step towards addressing decades-old issues faced by the apartment community across the state.

'Not scared of threats'

Taking a hard stance against attempts to leverage the issue for political gain, Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar sharply responded to a letter from Kiran Hebbar, a resident who had allegedly threatened that the apartment owners could influence the GBA elections if the government did not heed their demands.

"One must have basic common sense about who they are talking to? We are not scared of threats," he asserted.

He stressed that the government was reaching out to them out of respect and willingness to serve, not out of fear.

North corpn holds 'walkaluru' to assess state of footpaths

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Bengaluru North City Corporation held its sixth edition of project 'walkaluru', - a walk to assess the condition of footpaths. This edition covered a ten-km stretch of footpath in Yelahanka, and more than 100 people participated in the walk. The walk started from Sheshadripuram College on Doddaballapur Main Road and proceeded through Radial 1st A Main Road, 16th 'B' Cross, and Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan Road.

"The main objective of the initiative was to enable citizens to walk without fear, obstruction, or inconvenience. It was also communicated that pedestrians can report obstacles by sharing photos or videos with the corporation, and corrective action would be taken promptly," the corporation said in a press release.

Surprisingly, a majority of the participants said that the walk on the footpath was satisfactory and only six obstacles were reported. Of them, two were Bescom-related encroachments, one was related to encroachment on footpath by a petrol bunk, two others were related to parking of vehicles on the footpath, and another two complaints about illegal banners and flex occupying the footpath.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

Thump! Celebration Bangalore 1/2 Marathon, 10K Run: Life is Calling, NICE Toll Plaza, Behind PES College, Ring Road, Nayandahalli; 5.30 am.

Release of writer C Veeranna's book 'Kannada Literature Historical Development 3': Veeranna Rajura, book introduction by C Nagabhushan, Navakarnataka Prakashana, Bapuji Hall, Gandhi Bhavan, Kumarakrupa Road; 10.30 am.

Maharishi Valmiki Jayanti and Pratibha Puraskara: B N Chandrashekhariah, M. Krishnappa, Priyakrishna, Pradeep Krishna participate, Vijayanagara Nayaka Sangha, Rajajinagar; 10 am.

CULTURAL

Classical dance: Bharathanatyam and Kuchipudi; Sri Padmavathi Kala Nikethan; Sri Krishnadevaraya Kala Mandiram, Telugu Vignana Samithi, Malleswaram; 6 pm.

Church Choir: Carols by Candlelight – Gloria in Excelsis Deo, a musical celebration featuring a selection of contemporary and traditional carols conducted by Samuel Samson and Santosh Baynes; St John's Church; 6 pm.

Yakshagana: 'Karna Bhedana', Bhagavatha Balakrishna Hillodi, Maddale Raghavendra Bhat, Mummela Ravi Aithumane, Anand Shigehalli, Manoj Bhat Elagadde, Nirman Yakshabalaga, Vetchi Mane, No 14, 5th Cross, 6th Road, Chamarajpet; 6 pm.

Play: 'Raktha-Dhwaja' play directed by Dakshayini Bhat A, Kalagrama, Mallathahalli; 7 pm.

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST
Mist

TEMPERATURES

Maximum	29.2°C
Minimum	14.7°C
Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	--
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	51%
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Sunrise (Dec 15)	6:33 am
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PERSONAL

Change of Name

I, CARUNIA SELLAVARA, have changed my name to CHELLAVARA CARUNIA, vide affidavit dated 12/12/2025 before notary M. Rajendra, Bangalore.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, **ARVIND SHARMA & ARVIND KUMAR SHARMA** S/o Harindar Sharma, residing at # 09, Sizzle SM Spring Field, Kammasandra Village, Bidarahalli Post, Bengaluru - 560049, declare that the above names pertain to me only. Henceforth I shall be known as **ARVIND SHARMA**, vide affidavit 11.12.2025 before notary Udaykumar K, Bengaluru.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, **Gopadi Subbarao Nagaraj Upadhyaya, G S Nagaraj Upadhyaya** S/o G S Subba Rao, residing at No.1529/1, B S Road, Turuvekere -572227 Tumkur Dist., have changed my name to **G S NAGARAJ UPADHYA** vide affidavit dated 27.11.2025 before notary Eshwaar, Turuvekere.

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  - High School English teacher
- **ICSE & Cambridge**
  - Primary & Middle School Hindi Teacher
    Qualification - Bachelors/Masters with B.Ed.
  - Biology Teacher
    Grades - IGCSE, AS & A Level
    Qualification - Cambridge Trained & Certified teacher with B.Ed.
  - Middle & High School Teacher (French and AI & Robotics)
    Grades - 6 to 10
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  - High School Art Teacher
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Teething troubles mar Day 1 of overstay charges at KIA T1

Accessing taxis turns nightmare for passengers

ASRA MAVAD
BENGALURU, DHNS

The overstay charges imposed at the arrival kerbsides at Terminal 1 (T1) of the Kempegowda International Airport on Saturday, triggered teething problems throughout the day, leaving passengers fuming about how to get their cabs.

The new rules, which kicked in around 11 am, bar yellow board vehicles from accessing the arrival gate of T1.

As per rules, private vehicles will get eight minutes of free stay. They will be charged Rs 150 for 8-13 minutes and Rs 300 for 13-18 minutes.

Vehicles staying beyond 18 minutes will be towed to the nearest police station, with fines added.

Commercial vehicles must wait at designated parking zones, where they will get 10 minutes of complimentary parking. After that, cab drivers will have to pay Rs 150 for a half-hour slot.

To begin with, the biggest change a passenger/driver is to notice while approaching the arrivals gate of T1 is the segregated entry points.

With security officials and airport staff guarding the entry, it is ensured that no yellow board is allowed to enter the Arrivals and are directed to the dedicated parking zones for the terminal—P3 and P4.

With the newly enforced rules, the Arrivals premises remain much calmer—free of overcrowding taxis and loud hollers from pestering drivers, a complaint which was often raised by flyers.

Now, with just one portion dedicated to airport taxis, all three lanes remain free for private vehicles. Patrolling vehicles, both in-house and police, have been appointed to ensure smooth operations.

Passengers can access the dedicated parking zone by using the skywalk. DH PHOTOS/ASRA MAVAD

Signs put up across Terminal 1 at KIA.

Confusion all around

Despite the Bengaluru International Airport Limited's best efforts to place signage across the premises, make regular announcements about changes and deploy personnel to guide flyers, passengers arriving at the terminal remain confused about how to access taxis.

While there are dedicated pickup zones for airport authorised aggregators such as Airport Taxi, Uber, Ola, Quick Ride, OHM electric cabs, Uber Black and WTI cabs, to access any other yellow board vehicles, one will need to walk to the allotted parking zone—which is located at a distance of about 15-20 minutes from the Arrivals.

Passengers perplexed

Several passengers were left perplexed, waiting at the gate, wondering why their taxi hadn't arrived to pick them up yet. Most senior citizens found the walk to the parking zone exhausting.

While buggies are available on the premises, along with facilities like elevators and escalators, lack of awareness was a problem for many. A 70-year-old visiting from Delhi was bewildered by the mismanagement.

"I booked the porter service because I needed assistance as I'm recovering from hip surgery. But the porter ended up causing me more trouble. He told me I had to walk as all the buggies were busy. After reaching the parking lot, he tells me that we could've just taken the elevator. I was furious," she told *DH*.

While several buggies could be seen moving around the premises, the ground staff too remained unaware of how or where to hail one. KV Pradeep, 77, too had to walk the distance after not being offered a buggy.

"It would be ideal if they made some exceptions for senior citizens, parents with young kids and the differently abled. The sudden change in rules not only feels inconvenient, but also impractical. We're having to drag five big trolleys and two toddlers. No one wants to do this at the end of their journey," said G Prashanth, who was travelling with his mother and two kids.

The same rules were enforced at Terminal 2 (T2) on Friday. However, as the change in operations remains minimal at T2, it is smoother there compared to T1.

The Réussir Trust hosted 'Inspire-ED 2025' in city on Saturday where teachers, principals, trainers, and education leaders gathered in large numbers. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Experts weigh in on how AI will help teachers, not replace them

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Réussir Trust hosted the annual meeting 'Inspire-ED 2025' on Saturday, where teachers, principals, trainers and education leaders gathered in large numbers. The main goal was to figure out new and better ways to teach children and young adults across India. he conference started with awards to honour contributors in education and then moved into in-depth discussions.

Key ideas that emerged included one on making learning more inclusive. The experts agreed that teaching must be fair and welcoming to all students, including those with different learning styles (neurodiversity) or from different backgrounds. They stressed the need for classrooms where students feel safe. Another topic was use of technology and AI. How digital tools like Artificial Intelligence (AI), online/in-person classes can be used to enhance learning was and how digital portfolios could help students move smoothly from high school to college were discussed. The clear message was: Technology should help teachers do a better job, not replace them.

Teachers wanted evaluation based on real-world skills (competency-based assessment) and continuous training that truly helps teachers grow. They agreed that students today need more than just book knowledge. They need creativity, adaptability and specific job skills. The proposal was to add skill-based classes into regular school subjects and work closely with businesses to make students ready for jobs.

The final discussion focused on how education groups can raise money and keep projects going (social entrepreneurship and fundraising). Inspire-ED 2025 ended on a high note, reminding everyone that transforming education was absolutely possible when we give teachers, who are the heart of the system, the support and respect they have earned.

Ricky Kej alleges theft on social media; no complaint lodged

BENGALURU, DHNS: Grammy-winning music director Ricky Kej was allegedly robbed at his residence in Bengaluru on Thursday evening, with CCTV footage suggesting the involvement of a food delivery executive. But, he did not lodge a formal police complaint despite Indiranagar police waiting outside his residence for over four hours on Saturday, following his social media post alleging theft by a food delivery executive.

Police sources said personnel visited Kej's residence in Indiranagar after noticing his post on X, in which he claimed that a delivery executive trespassed into his house and had stolen a sump cover. However, Kej did not come forward to record a complaint. His family members, including mother also allegedly did not cooperate when police repeatedly requested that a formal complaint be filed.

Sources said police discussed possibility of registering a suo motu case and consulted senior officers. However, they were advised that in court proceedings, the complainant's presence would be mandatory, and in the absence of cooperation, police could face complications during trial.

Kej's social media post alleged that the incident occurred around 6 pm on Thursday. He claimed that a man, suspected to be a Zomato delivery executive, entered his premises and stole a sump cover. Kej alleged that the suspect had visited the house about 15 minutes earlier, possibly to survey the area, before returning to commit the theft.

Kej said the entire incident was captured on CCTV cameras from two angles. Meanwhile, Zomato responded on social media, stating that appropriate action would be taken against the delivery executive after an internal investigation.

This model demonstrated how artificial intelligence and robotic technologies can be used in streamlining complex construction processes, boosting efficiency, and paving the way for a more sustainable urban development.

Designuru spotlights AI, 3D printing as future of construction

BENGALURU, DHNS: Day three of Designuru 5.0, the city's premier design festival at Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, focused on the technological shifts poised to redefine the construction industry. The Saturday programme brought together architects, engineers, and industry leaders to explore the potential of cutting-edge tools and alternative building systems.

The day commenced with a session on AI, Robotics, and 3D Printing Construction, led by Adithya from Tvasta construction, IIT Madras. The session looked at how artificial intelligence and robotic technologies are essential in streamlining complex construction processes, boosting efficiency, and paving the way for faster, more sustainable urban development.

The discussion was swiftly followed by a practical demonstration. Architect Dinesh Verma inaugurated a live exhibit of 3D printing in construction. It offered attendees a close look at how additive manufacturing is now being applied directly on-site, marking a significant change from traditional building methods and hinting at its future scalability.

The noon session, titled "Alternate Construction Technologies" featured presentations on scalable, future-ready building systems. Srinivas Reddy, MD of ARTO, highlighted precast construction technology as a path forward, stressing its advantages in speed, rigorous quality control, and cost-effectiveness.

The sessions, hosted by architect Anshul Chodha and engineer Arjun, underscored Designuru 5.0's commitment to fostering dialogue on bridging the gap between design innovation, technology, and the future of urban infrastructure in Bengaluru.

City police turn tech-savvy to manage celebration crowds this New Year

Over 25 drones, real-time analytics for crowd management

MANJUNATH SHETTAR
BENGALURU, DHNS

With New Year celebrations expected to draw lakhs of people to MG Road, Brigade Road, Koramangala and Indiranagar, the Bengaluru City Police are chalking out what they claim as a technology-driven crowd management plan the city has ever seen so far.

After the stampede that occurred during the RCB victory celebrations, the government and the police department are on heightened alert. Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh, told *DH* that extensive inter-departmental coordination, advanced surveillance tools, and real-time analytics are being deployed as a part of the measures. He said the idea is to "party with responsibility."

Another senior officer, who is in-charge of overseeing the arrangement, told *DH*, "We will deploy more than 25 drones across key locations on New Year's Eve to strengthen aerial surveillance and crowd management. The Law and Order division will operate 16–17 drones, and BTP will use 10 drones to monitor major junctions and celebration hotspots. The drones will track crowd movement, congestion points, emergency access routes, sudden surges, and isolated disturbances. Some of the devices are equipped with thermal imaging, enabling effective monitoring after midnight when visibility drops," the officer told *DH*.

He added, "Compared to last year, we are increasing CCTV coverage by at least 10% across MG Road, Brigade Road, Church Street, St Mark's Road, Indiranagar, Koramangala 80 Feet Road and major entry and exit points. We have also asked private establishments to link their CCTV feeds to our network during the time for better monitoring. This gives us live visibility across interior lanes and improves response."

The police have integrated AI-based fire detection sensors into surveillance network to alert control rooms instantly in case of fire or smoke, ensuring faster response during emergencies.

Police are particularly focusing on preventing harassment of vulnerable groups. "Women and children must feel safe. There's zero tolerance towards harassment, drunk nuisance and crowd misbehaviour, " they said,

The police have also integrated AI-based fire detection sensors into the surveillance network to alert control rooms instantly in case of fire or smoke, ensuring faster response during emergencies. DH FILE PHOTO FOR REPRESENTATION.

Assessing changing crowd patterns

The police have started using mechanisms to assess the changing patterns of crowds in different places. "The nature of the crowd is very different in each location. On MG Road–Brigade Road, the crowd is mostly first-time visitors and onlookers who come to see the gathering, more out of curiosity. The crowd at Koramangala behave differently. They are largely tech employees, residents of PGs and younger groups from the IT corridor. Their movement patterns, timing and density are not the same as those in the other areas. This will help us draw up a strategy for crowd control", the officer explained.

How colour-coded alerts help

One of the biggest development this year is the use of heat-map technology to measure crowd density in real-time. "We analyse the number of heads visible in each frame. When density crosses safe limits, the zone becomes a hotspot. Colour-coded alerts help us respond quickly—green for free movement, yellow for moderate congestion, dark orange when it approaches unsafe limits, and red when it becomes critical. Once an area turns red, we stop inflow and divert groups, stagger movement and deploy additional personnel. We have also identified several high-risk points like the MG Road–Brigade Road junction, Cauvery Emporium Junction, St Mark's–Brigade Road intersections, Church Street entries, Koramangala 80 Feet Road, and the Sony World signal area", the officer explained.

"We used heat maps last year as well, but the accuracy and deployment strategy have improved significantly."

OTHER MEASURES

- Drones, some equipped with thermal imaging, to monitor movement patterns, choke points, emergency access routes, crowd surges and isolated disturbances.
- AI-enabled sensors to detect sparks, fire-like anomalies and smoke. If anything appears in a frame, the system alerts instantly, and police coordinate with the fire brigade.
- The command centre helps analyse obstructions like blocked pathways, illegally parked vehicles, unauthorised vendor clusters, disruptions in camera visibility and crowd pockets forming near bars.
- Additional patrolling teams, women protection squads, quick response teams, anti-harassment units and special traffic detachments will be deployed.

Air India Express to restore flight service to Muscat

MANGALURU, DHNS: Air India Express will restore connectivity to Muscat from Mangaluru from March 2026 with two flights per week.

Accordingly, IX 817/818 IXE-MCT-IXE will operate every Sundays and Tuesdays.

Accordingly, the first IXE-MCT flight IX 817 will operate on March 1 with the return flight IX 818 returning the same day. The second IX 817 & IX 818 flight will operate on March 3 with the next flight on the route being on March 8, 10, 15, 17, 22 and 24, respectively.

The summer schedule will start on March 29, wherein the timings and schedules of flights from Mangaluru will change.

Air India Express last operated to Muscat on July 14 in the summer schedule of 2025, with a frequency of four flight a week, before suspending the services.

Cops use 'air down' method to free truck stuck under flyover

ASHWIN B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

A container truck driver's miscalculation caused significant traffic chaos on the busy stretch under the Kittur Rani Chennamma Flyover at Padmanabhanagar late Saturday night. The oversized vehicle became wedged at 10:25 pm, despite the flyover's clear height warning of 4.50 metres.

The incident led to a traffic snarl, with vehicles stranded on the arterial route. The truck was struck under the flyover for over 30 minutes. Traffic police personnel quickly arrived at the scene and executed a specialised manoeuvre: an 'air down' of the truck's suspension system (blade set). This method reduced the vehicle's overall height by a few inches, allowing the driver to slowly reverse the trapped truck and clear the underpass.

The swift intervention by the Bengaluru Traffic police prevented the minor incident from escalating into a full-blown night-long jam. Authorities are likely to impose a penalty on the driver for reckless disregard of traffic signage.

The container truck stuck under the Kittur Rani Chennamma flyover in Padmanabhanagar on Saturday. DH PHOTO/ HITA PRAKASH

DH SPECIAL

Decoding the past with digital precision

ASHWANI KUMAR N K R
MANGALURU, DHNS

Inscriptions have long served as primary sources for reconstructing history. Today, technological advancements such as high-resolution imaging, digital archiving and other unconventional methods are transforming the way these ancient records are studied and preserved, complementing traditional methods with greater accuracy and accessibility.

Among those at the forefront of this shift is Shruthesh Acharya, an epigraphy expert and museum curator at Kuvempu University. His work combines meticulous field methods with modern documentation techniques. Shruthesh has independently discovered and transcribed over 100 inscriptions and has read more than 200 inscriptions on request, especially those found in the coastal Karnataka region. They include a 15th-century inscription at Ballamanja and the Bukkaraya I inscription.

He performs careful estampage of inscriptions and creates a digital repository using high-resolution images that capture even the finest details. To strengthen authenticity, he also records videos of the sites.

Shruthesh emphasised that stone slab inscriptions, most of which are carved on granite, must be handled with extreme care. "Rough handling can damage or break them. Preserving history begins with recording it accurately," he said.

According to Shruthesh, transcribing an inscription can take seven to 15 days, depending on its length. Negative images are preserved for archival purposes and copies of the transcriptions are submitted to the Archaeological Department. "I also make it a point to raise awareness among local communities about the importance of protecting these inscriptions," he said. Shruthesh has created a digital archive and published research articles, including studies on the Bangarasa inscription of Sajipamuda and a herostone inscription from the Alupa period in Udyavara. He also mentors students in identifying and documenting inscriptions.

Numismatist Manderke Nityananda Pai, a renowned inscription reader who has also guided Shruthesh, noted that while the estampage method remains in use, high-resolution photography has become increasingly popular. Pai said digital techniques, often involving white chalk to highlight text, allow researchers to zoom in for better clarity and long-term reference.

Echoing this view, B Jagadish Shetty, Administrative Officer at the Rashtrakavi Govinda Pai Research Centre in Udupi, said inscriptions remain the most authentic historical sources. Shetty uses both physical and digital estampage methods.

Shejeshwar R Nayak, Director of the Archaeology Department, highlighted the broader value of inscriptions. "They offer insights into the social, religious, political and economic systems of ancient times, including taxation," he said.

With the growing emphasis on digital archiving, Nayak said GPS-tagged records would play a crucial role in locating and preserving archaeological sites.

Shruthesh Acharya prepares to transcribe an inscription.

INTERVIEW | Science-driven solutions aligned with circular economy principles

Foods for astronauts, elderly and kids: Sky's the limit for CFTRI

SHILPA P
MYSURU, DHNS

CSIR-Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), a premier food science and technology institute in Mysuru, is set to integrate artificial intelligence into food processing and quality assurance.

The institute, which pioneered infant supplementary specialty food formulation technology for Amul way back in 1956, is now developing food for astronauts.

Here are excerpts from an interview **Shilpa P** had with **Dr Giridhar Parvatam**, director of CSIR-CFTRI.

CFTRI is catering to the nutrition needs of all segments of population. Please share new initiatives to support the elderly.

We have developed various food products for the elderly including high-protein, easily digestible foods, low-glycemic index items for diabetics, fiber-rich options for constipation relief, fortified blended foods and ready-to-consume or cook functional meals. Many of these technologies are already available for transfer; many R&D projects are underway - focusing on elder-friendly texture-modified foods; protein-rich supplements for muscle health; micronutrient-fortified foods for immunity and bone health; low-salt, low-sugar, heart-healthy formulations; foods for digestive comfort and hydration support.

Can you elaborate on space food for astronauts?

CFTRI is developing specialised functional foods for astronauts. These foods are designed to support gut and liver health, address bone deformation and maintain metabolic balance during long space missions. The formulations are designed to address challenges, including bone density loss, altered digestion, reduced nutrient absorption and oxidative stress. This initiative reflects our goal to deliver validated solutions for astronauts by 2030.

Tell us about new innovative products for special categories/sectors like sportspersons.

The institute is developing innovative nutrition solutions for athletes and those with high physical activity, including 'hydration sports drink'. This product aims to enhance endurance, support hydration and promote faster recovery using natural, science-backed ingredients as healthier alternative to traditional sports drinks.

We offer technologies for ethnic foods and folklore communities as well. We are receiving inquiries for glycemic index (GI) foods, to assess quality and bioactive compounds.

It is understood that CFTRI has nearly 440 technologies. Educate us about collaborations with government and private partners.

CFTRI offers over 440 ready-to-transfer technologies, and nearly 5,000 licenses were given in India and beyond. Each year, it develops 10–15 new technologies. CFTRI collaborates with industry partners and start-ups through research projects and consultancy services.

It offers quality-assessment services through NABL-accredited, FSSAI-notified referral food laboratory, serving industry and regulatory agencies.

Cheluvambavilas Palace in Mysuru, where CFTRI is housed.

> We offer technologies for ethnic foods and folklore communities as well. We are receiving inquiries for glycemic index (GI) foods, to assess quality and bioactive compounds.
>
> **Dr Giridhar Parvatam**
> Director of CSIR-CFTRI

Tell us more about the institute's innovations

CFTRI focuses on developing food processing machinery tailored for Indian MSME sector. We have worked on mechanising and automating traditional food preparation to enable large-scale production without sacrificing quality. More than 15 types of machinery have been developed for items like dosa, chapati, idli and vada, with design know-how shared with licensees across India.

What is the way forward and vision for CFTRI?

Our focus is on creating sustainable, science-driven solutions aligned with circular economy principles. We prioritise developing nutritious foods, especially those with controlled sugar and salt, to benefit everyone. We aim to integrate AI, machine learning and digital tools into food processing and quality assurance.

Can you elaborate on technical assistance and guidance from the institute?

The institute offers technical assistance and mentoring to entrepreneurs, start-ups and women self-help groups. Annually, CFTRI conducts around 50 short-term courses (of 3-15 days), covering food processing, product development, quality management, packaging and business skills.

How is the institute involved in helping malnourished children?

CFTRI has developed products for children since its inception. Amul infant food has been a big success. A ragi malt-based weaning food for children aged 6 months to 3 years was developed in 1982 and was transferred to over 25 entrepreneurs.

It collaborated with women and child development departments of states to develop products that address malnutrition and menu fatigue among kids.

A special kit with 5 to 6 products, including high-protein rusk, protein-rich burfi, spirulina chikki and mango bar was designed to combat malnutrition in the 1-3 years age group.

Tell us about the institute's millet-based products.

The institute has gained expertise in millet processing, nutrition and product development. In 2023, international year of millets, CFTRI was the nodal lab for CSIR's millet mission, developing over 50 technologies, including nutri-bars, beverages, semolina, ready-to-eat products and multi-millet bun.

A compendium of 130 millet varieties, including nutritional and analytical profiles, was published to assist researchers and industry. CFTRI has established 7 millet-processing lines and a baked-products unit, along with a quality-control lab at its centre of excellence. This facility allows farmers and entrepreneurs to transform raw millets into value-added products.

Shivakumar will become CM on Jan 6 or 9, says Congress MLA

Union minister Somanna backs Parameshwara for CM post

RAMANAGARA/TUMAKURU, PTI

A ruling Congress MLA, H A Iqbal Hussain, on Saturday predicted that Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar will become Chief Minister on January 6 or 9.

He said the post, presently occupied by Siddaramaiah, should be vacated for Shivakumar. Shivakumar should be given a chance to become chief minister, the Ramanagara MLA told reporters.

"There is a 99% chance that he becomes chief minister on January 6," Hussain, who is a staunch supporter of Shivakumar, said.

When asked what significance the date has, he said, "I don't know. It's just a random number. Everybody is saying this. It can either be January 6 or 9. These are the two dates."

Hussain has been demanding that Shivakumar should be made the chief minister. On Friday, he had made his wish public.

Meanwhile, Shivakumar said there's no need to take Iqbal Hussain's statements on leadership change seriously. "Don't take him seriously. He is talkative," he said

Union Minister of State for Railways and a BJP MP, V Somanna, said that he is supporting Home Minister G Parameshwara for the CM post.

"Getting power is luck. I don't think Parameshwara will remain just the home minister. It is our wish to see him as CM. Not just me but the people of Tumakuru have this desire to see him as the CM," Somanna said at a programme in Tumakuru.

When someone from the audience asked about D K Shivakumar, who is a strong contender for the post, Somanna said, "Leave it. That's secondary. What Shivakumar wants to become depends on his luck. Conduct is even bigger than luck."

Siddaramaiah, DKS in Delhi for Congress rally

BENGALURU, DHNS: CM Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar will participate at a Congress event against 'vote chori' in Delhi on Sunday.

More than 1,000 Congress leaders and workers from Karnataka have left for Delhi, Shivakumar said here.

He left for the national capital on Saturday itself.

"It's a message to BJP that constitutional posts must not be misused," Shivakumar told reporters.

"In Aland case, charge sheet has been filed. There's evidence to show that Rs 800 was paid to shift one vote. Attempts were made to shift or delete votes using phone numbers of persons from outside Karnataka," the state Congress president said.

BJP leader Guttedar, son named prime accused in Aland 'vote chori' case

Accused charged with forgery, impersonation & destruction of evidence

KALABURAGI, DHNS

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has filed a charge sheet against former BJP MLA Subhas Guttedar, his son Harshanand and five others in the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) court in Bengaluru on Friday in connection with the Aland voter fraud case in Kalaburagi district.

In a 22,000-page charge sheet, SIT has named both BJP leader and his son as accused A-1 and A-2 respectively for attempting to delete the names of 5,994 voters from the Aland voters' list before the 2023 Assembly polls. The four-time MLA Guttedar had defeated B R Patil by a slender margin of 697 votes in the 2018 Assembly elections. Patil, however, wrested Aland seat back from Guttedar in the 2023 polls by 9,348 votes.

Guttedar, then sitting MLA, had hatched the criminal conspiracy with other accused persons for his personal and political gain. He had identified a possible list of voters, who did not vote for him, while other accused deleted their names by submitting form-7 through the National Voter Service Portal (NVSP) of Election Commission, without the consent and notice of the original voters, the charge sheet alleged.

The others accused named in the charge sheet are the BJP leader's personal assistant Tipperudra (A-3), Akram Pasha (A-4), his brother Aslam Pasha (A-5), their relative Mohammad Ashak Ahmad, all residents of Kalaburagi, and Bapi Adya, a native of West Bengal.

The government had formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the leadership of CID ADGP B K Singh to conduct the probe into the case. The team had conducted raids at houses and business establishments belonging to the BJP leader and his children in Aland apart from undertaking search operations at residences of their loyalists in Kalaburagi in October.

Both father and son are also charged with the act of burning and destroying evidence under sections 90 120(29), 182, 409, 419, 464, 465, 468, 471, 201, 204 2 34 2 68C, 84C of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Akram Pasha and Mohammad Ashpak Ahmad had hatched a conspiracy to illegally obtain the mobile number and OTP required to create a login ID. Bapi Adya provided them the OTP through https://otpbazar.online which he operated in exchange for money.

They had planned a criminal conspiracy to create a login ID on the NVSP portal by illegally using the mobile number and OTP to identify the voters online, the charge sheet explained.

The accused have been charged with providing false information to a public servant, forgery, impersonation and destruction of evidence under various sections of Indian Penal Code. Guttedar and his son have secured anticipatory bail, while Bapi Adya has been arrested in the case. All others have been already questioned by SIT.

Guttedar rebuts charges

Rebutting the charges of his involvement in an attempt to delete voters' names, Subhas Guttedar accused MLA B R Patil of hatching a conspiracy to prevent him or his son from contesting the next assembly election from Aland.

"The charges levelled against me are totally false and this is concocted by B R Patil. SIT has named us as prime accused in the charge sheet after coming under pressure from the state government. We do not know about the other five persons named in the charge sheet. We will fight against it legally," he said.

Cong leaders also helped in my LS poll victory: Somanna

TUMAKURU, DHNS: Tumkur BJP Lok Sabha member and Union Minister of State for Railways V Somanna has said that Congress leaders too extended their "cooperation" in ensuring his victory in the last Lok Sabha elections.

V Somanna

Somanna made the disclosure in the presence of Home Minister G Parameshwara, while launching work on a railway overbridge in Heggere on the outskirts of Tumakuru on Saturday.

While wishing that Parameshwara should be the next chief minister, Somanna said Congress leaders were also responsible for his electoral victory.

When MLA S Suresh Gowda, who was also there sought to know what about D K Shivakumar, the minister deflected the matter saying they are all secondary and could be spoken of at a later time.

Vijayendra plans defamation case against Yatnal

SHIVAMOGGA, DHNS: State BJP president B Y Vijayendra has said that he is contemplating to file a defamation suit against expelled party MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal for making 'false allegations' against him.

Vijayendra

Speaking to reporters here on Saturday, he said that his patience had a limit. "It seems Yatnal can't have food without speaking against me," Vijayendra said. He was referring to Yatnal's allegation that Vijayendra had taken Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar to Delhi for a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah with the intention of making Shivakumar the CM and himself (Vijayendra) becoming deputy CM.

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2nd airport: Tenders floated for feasibility study of sites

Second airport, From Page 3

However, Patil said the government is not particularly looking for any other location outside the shortlisted sites. "Currently, we don't have any other location in mind. This has only been added to ensure we pick the best location out of all possible permutations and combinations in and around the city," added Patil.

Broad scope

From a bird's-eye view, the selected consultant's work will involve four broad groups — assessment of AAI's study on site feasibility, assessment of site technical feasibility, development of a strategic framework for site selection and selection of the preferred site.

A multi-faceted evaluation encompassing technical, strategic, operational, environmental and economic elements will be carried out by the chosen consultant.

This will begin with a thorough analysis of AAI's previous feasibility studies, with emphasis on physical characteristics like land size, rainfall pattern, topography, and zoning; meteorological conditions; the availability of infrastructure for power, water, and sewage; and environmental considerations.

Apart from this, the surrounding population and development at each location and distance from Bengaluru's main demand centres will also be analysed.

As part of the technical feasibility study, the consultant will be required to do assessments of drainage and soil, topographical, geotechnical, hydrological, and meteorological surveys, obstacle limitation surface (OLS) studies and power lines and other utilities that would require diversion. The consultant will also be responsible for getting the statutory approvals and regulatory clearances required for setting up the airport.

Airspace management remains a key factor. The study will evaluate the feasibility of integrating the site with the region's air traffic control systems to assess potential airspace conflicts with the Kempegowda International Airport and other existing airfields, including military airstrips in the region. Impact on tourism also needs to be highlighted in the study.

The RFP also highlights traffic demand assessment and forecasting.

"The consultant shall assess and present a reasonable forecast of air, rail and road traffic volume and requirements for passengers/tourists and goods/commodities," noted the tender. The consultant will project passenger and cargo traffic over a 35-year horizon, with estimates at five-year intervals.

Task force to steer Quantum City vision by month-end

13-member body to drive policy, talent, partnerships

DH SPECIAL

ASRA MAVAD
BENGALURU, DHNS

A dedicated task force, which sits at the helm of Karnataka's ambitious Quantum Mission, will be operational by the end of December, Science and Technology Minister N S Boseraju said.

With multiple US, Swiss, and Israel-based business giants, as well as startups reaching out to the Karnataka government regarding the upcoming Q-city project, Boseraju said, "It is time for the task force to kickstart operations as early as possible."

"Once the Belagavi winter session wraps up, we will set the task force into motion and formally announce it by year-end. I want it to be a dedicated vision group, with representation from all sectors. There needs to be people with scientific knowledge, and also experts who can work as the middlemen between the government and entrepreneurs. We are bringing in people from across the country," he added.

The cross-sector task force will consist of 13 members — four government officials, six industry experts from the private sector, and three senior researchers and institution leaders.

The government officials nominated to be part of the vision group include the Development Commissioner, Secretary of the Department of Electronics, IT-BT, and Biotechnology, Secretary of the Department of Industries and Commerce, and Secretary of the Higher Education Department.

From academia, quantum experts from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Raman Research Institute (RRI), and another leading university or national laboratory will join the group.

To implement the Karnataka Quantum Roadmap and enable Quantum City to become an industry-friendly innovation cluster, the task force will have seven key responsibilities: policy and incentive design, skilling and talent, infrastructure and testbeds, startup and industry enablement, international partnerships, standards, IP and security, and defining and monitoring key performance indicators.

Way forward

Speaking to *DH*, IISc Professor Arindam Ghosh highlighted key elements the task force will prioritise once it kicks off.

Prof Ghosh played a central role in the Quantum India Bengaluru Summit 2025, held during July and August.

"The task force will first need to identify what the priority items the quantum city will undertake in a phase-wise manner — whether quantum computing, international networking, and the startup ecosystem, among many other sectors," he said, stressing the need for global networking and large-scale skilling and outreach programmes.

The task force will also focus on creating a manufacturing ecosystem. "And for that, one needs to have infrastructure built. The task force will have to identify what kind of infrastructure needs to be created," he added.

Prof Ghosh also provided insight into the recently proposed Quantum Materials Innovation Network (Q-MINt). Chief Minister Siddaramaiah recently wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking support to establish Q-MINt in Bengaluru under the National Quantum Mission (NQM).

"It turns out that one of the key aspects that has been missing from India is high-quality materials, like semiconductors and superconductors. These are not produced in India, and in most cases, we have to buy them. So, the idea is to create a central resource for these kinds of materials," he said.

"In Bengaluru, we have the right know-how and the right people to make these materials. We want to consolidate under one single system," he added.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah felicitates Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti, who completed 45 years as MLC, at a function in Hubballi on Saturday. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, Speaker U T Khader and legislators, cutting across party lines, are seen. DH PHOTO

CM heaps praise on 'non-partisan' Horatti for unbeaten 45-year run in Council

'Can be chairman of House till Cong gets majority'

HUBBALLI, DHNS

Heaping praise on Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said he is a non-partisan politician and hence elected eight times consecutively from the same teachers' constituency (Karnataka West).

The CM was speaking after felicitating Horatti on his completion of 45 years as member of Legislative Council here on Saturday.

"All political parties have come together to honour Horatti, which shows he is beyond political boundaries. Eight consecutive wins in the MLC polls is the result of his work for the teachers and for addressing their issues. He is popularly called 'Horaatada Horatti' because of his dedication towards the welfare of teachers," said Siddaramaiah.

Siddaramaiah, in a lighter vein, said that he would campaign against Horatti if he contests the upcoming election to the Karnataka West Teachers' Constituency from a party other than his own (BJP).

"Horatti contested the election on a BJP ticket and was elected as an MLC and later became the chairman of the Council. Personally, I wish that he becomes an MLC once again. But if he contests on the BJP ticket in the next election, I will campaign against him," he said.

He noted that the Congress was short of just one seat to attain a majority in the Council and expressed hope that the party would secure it in the next MLC election. Till then, Horatti will continue as the chairman.

Recalling his association with Horatti in Janata Parivar, the chief minister said, "Horatti had made sincere efforts to reunite the JD(S) and JD(U). But, due to the decisions of top leaders, his efforts did not yield the desired results".

High Court denies higher compensation claim over inconsistencies in statements

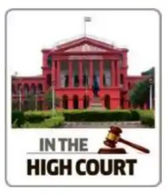
AMBARISH B
BENGALURU, DHNS

The High Court, in a recent judgement, said that just filing a charge sheet against the rider of the offending motorcycle is not sufficient to accept the claimant's version of the accident and award compensation.

The court said this while dismissing the appeal filed by a claimant seeking higher compensation after finding inconsistencies in his statements regarding the accident.

According to the claimant, Raghavendra of Thirthahalli taluk in Shivamogga district, an accident occurred on September 15, 2013, in front of Sahyadri Narayana Hrudayalaya Hospital of Arakare Village. The complaint, filed on December 10, 2013, by the claimant's father Shyamu Shettigar, stated that Raghavendra was riding pillion on his own motorcycle driven by his brother-in-law Annappa when another motorcycle hit them from behind.

Raghavendra filed a claim petition stating that he suffered permanent disability to the extent of 28% to the whole body. In September 2019, a tribunal at Shivamogga awarded Rs 2.03 lakh compensation to be paid jointly by the owner of the offending motorcycle and the insurance company.



Raghavendra appealed against the verdict, seeking higher compensation, while the insurer challenged the order, disputing the involvement of the insured vehicle in the accident.

Justice Umesh M Adiga noted that the claimant's statements during the cross-examination created doubt on his credibility.

Though he had given the history of injuries both at Sahyadri Narayana Hrudayalaya in Shivamogga and at Wenlock Hospital in Mangaluru, the records from Wenlock Hospital do not indicate that the accident occurred due to the involvement of the offending motorcycle, the court said.

Justice Adiga observed that the medical records indicated the claimant had told the medical officer that he skidded and fell from his motorcycle, which appeared to be the true account of the incident. The claimant's story of the accident, allegedly to claim compensation, was found to be fabricated, it said.

The court further noted that the mere filing of a police charge sheet is not sufficient to accept the claimant's or the police's contentions, especially when the claimant's statements are doubtful. While normally a charge sheet may serve as prima facie proof of an accident, in this case, there was enough evidence to disbelieve it. The tribunal had failed to properly consider this evidence in its decision, it said.

As a result, the court allowed the insurance company's appeal, rejected Raghavendra's appeal, and ordered that any amount already paid by the insurer under the tribunal's order be refunded.

PAIN FOR LATER GAIN

Road development work slows down the movement of traffic and endangers pedestrians at Gandhi Circle in Davangere on Saturday. DH PHOTO/SATISH BADIGER

Boost to MPM as MoEF classifies plantation as forestry activity

CHIRANJEEVI KULKARNI
BENGALURU, DHNS

Giving a shot in the arm to Mysore Paper Mills' (MPM) effort to restart plantation activities on 56,000 acres, a high-level committee of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has clarified that plantations raised for industrial purposes would be considered forest activities as long as such activities are taken up as per approved working plans.

The revision of guidelines under the amended Forest (Conservation) Act had declared that plantations of low rotation, including plantation of medicinal plants in the forest land, "shall be considered non-forestry" activities. This meant that such plantations were treated as commercial activity and lease of land attracted the compensatory afforestation laws. In cases like MPM, such a rule would involve paying crores of rupees for compensation and other payments.

In MPM, about 5,000 acres of plantation matured for extraction was put off following the guidelines. The MPM management plan expired back in 2022. "Both acacia and eucalyptus are considered of best value for the paper industry between eight and 10 years. Approval from the Centre is required before restarting the activities. We hope that the delay will not have a negative impact," an official said.

The state government had reached out to the Union ministry, requesting that the lease of the forest lands renewed in 2020 for plantation not be considered as non-forest activity. Soon after, similar requests were received from Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The proposals were placed before the forest advisory committee (FAC) to decide on the policy matter.

The committee deliberated on the matter on December 2 and noted that the Centre had already differentiated between commercial plantations under the Green Credit scheme and those done by the state/union territory governments.

"Plantations proposed to be raised for various purposes, in accordance with the management prescriptions of the Working Plan/Management Plan, with the primary objective of restoring forest land, while also meeting the requirements on a sustainable basis, cannot be considered as entirely commercial or non-forestry activity," the committee noted.

The committee then decided that "activities undertaken in accordance with provisions of an approved working plan/management plan, applicable in such cases and under the supervision of the state forest department, shall be deemed to constitute forestry activities".

The committee said the state governments will have the power to devise a framework for using such plantations and for sharing the revenue on a case-to-case basis.

Ex-MLA Anjali Nimbalkar saves passenger's life mid-air

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Former Khanapur MLA and AICC Secretary (Goa in-charge) Dr Anjali Nimbalkar saved the life of a young American woman mid air on a Goa–Delhi flight on Saturday.

Dr Anjali was travelling to Delhi on an Indigo flight at 1.30 pm to attend the Congress Vote Chori rally scheduled at Ramleela Maidan on Sunday. Shortly after takeoff, the passenger began shivering, fainted, and lost her pulse. When the air hostess announced asking for the doctor, Anjali immediately stepped in, performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and revived her.

Dr Anjali Nimbalkar

About 30 minutes later, the woman collapsed again, but Dr. Anjali's timely intervention brought her back her pulse once more, sources said.

Dr Anjali remained by the patient's side for the entire duration of the flight, ensuring constant medical attention. Before landing, pilot announced about medical emergency and sought for an ambulance ready. Soon after landing at Delhi, the passenger was shifted to a hospital.

The pilot, crew, and co-passengers appreciated her calm, decisive action — many expressing their gratitude with a standing ovation, sources said.

Nimbalkar, who holds an MBBS degree with masters in Gynaecology and Laparoscopy, told *DH* , "When I saw the passenger, she had fainted. For a moment, even I felt scared. But I did whatever was needed to save her life."

After recovering slightly, the passenger said, "You have come to me like Mother Mary," Nimbalkar said.

"Dehydration, food issues or consuming certain medications can cause such problems. If treatment is not given within a few seconds, it will endanger life. Even with medical equipment available, saving a life is difficult. In such emergency situations, airplanes should have at least basic medical equipment. If there was just one IV set, it would be so helpful," Nimbalkar said.

"The passenger's mother-in-law is a gynaecologist in Delhi. Upon landing at Delhi airport, I called her mother-in-law, explained the situation and left for my work," she said.

'ICT3 launch delay ...

ICT3, From Page 3

When the department sent charges against former MD of Keonics to the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, it said, "There is no provision to initiate action on retired officials." The committee expressed unhappiness over such policies.

With the department of School Education and Literacy not taking the case seriously and failing to act on lapses in implementing ICT 3, the committee said over Rs 1,000 crore worth arbitration cases are pending in courts. "In one case, court had ordered the department to pay Rs 11.54 crore. The department has already deposited 75% of that," the committee said.

Following this case, the committee had recommended removal of the compulsory arbitration clause from tender contracts. The committee has recommended disciplinary action on officials responsible for delay in implementing the project and recover loss.

ICT is a centrally sponsored scheme. In 2008-09, the department of school education research and training decided to implement ICT phase 3 at 1,763 government and 2,633 aided high schools. The Centre had also approved Rs 426.68 crore for it in Aug 2009.

Following the government's decision to hand over implementation to Keonics, DSERT had requested Keonics to submit reports. But as it didn't respond, DSERT purchased batteries, projectors, UPS and mini printers from companies which have DGS&D contracts worth Rs 89.52 crore. This led to locking up of funds as purchase was made even before implementation. The department had spent Rs 73.64 crore on site development, internet, etc.

BJP wrests Kerala capital from Left in civic polls

Polls, From Page 3

"That is the beauty of democracy. The people's verdict must be respected, whether for the UDF overall or for the BJP in my constituency...I campaigned for a change from 45 years of LDF misrule, but the voters have ultimately rewarded another party that also sought a clear change in governance," he said.

He also said that the UDF's "impressive win" across the state was a massive endorsement and a powerful signal ahead of the Assembly polls.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, Thiruvananthapuram had witnessed NDA's Rajeev Chandrasekhar putting up a close fight to three-time MP Tharoor, reducing the latter's victory margin to 16,077 from 99,989 in 2019.

For Chandrasekhar, who took over as the BJP state president earlier this year, the party's victory in the state capital is a major image boost.

Chandrasekhar said it was the people's mandate for the development politics of the BJP. "The BJP is keeping on expanding its political footprint in Kerala. In the next Assembly election, the people would decide which party could bring in development. It will be a contest between the BJP and the Congress," he said.

He has already announced that he will contest from the Nemom seat, which falls in the Thiruvananthapuram city limits, in the Assembly election. His victory hopes are likely to brighten as the NDA won most of the local body wards coming under the Nemom seat.

Notably, the BJP opened its account in the Assembly from Nemom when party veteran O Rajagopal won the seat in 2016; The party, however, lost the seat to the LDF in 2021.

Thiruvananthapuram has been witnessing the BJP's surge since 2015, with the party winning 35 wards in 2015 and 2020 local body elections. The LDF, which has been ruling the corporation for more than four decades, saw its tally falling to 29 from the previous 52. The UDF, meanwhile, increased its tally from 10 to 19.

The Left Front's setback in Thiruvananthapuram has triggered criticism from within the CPM against outgoing Mayor Arya Rajendran, who was the youngest mayor of the country.

Referring to the results in the state capital, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the NDA gaining an upper hand in Thiruvananthapuram and the influence of communalism during the election campaign were matters of concern for those who believed in secularism. While the NDA improved its performance across the state, it couldn't perform well in Thrissur where it had scripted history by winning its first Lok Sabha seat in the state last year.

The coming months could witness the NDA announcing major development plans for the city to influence the voters across the state before the crucial Assembly polls. Chandrasekhar had announced that if the BJP won in Thiruvananthapuram, the prime minister himself would unveil a comprehensive development roadmap for the state capital within 45 days.

The curious question doing the rounds now is whether the BJP's senior district leader V V Rajesh or former DGP and first woman IPS officer from Kerala R Sreelekha will be the NDA's maiden mayor in the state.

Messi event turns messy...

Messi, From Page 3

Kolkata-based former footballers were later heard telling local news channels that he was not even allowed to kick a ball, let alone take a penalty kick, while he was on the ground. As it became clear that Messi was not returning, angry fans vandalised the stands before pouring into the ground, where they destroyed infrastructure and equipment.

Fans would later blame VIP culture — one attendee confirmed to *DH* that politicians were seen taking selfies with Messi while he was on the field — and overall mismanagement, and demanded action against the state's Sports Minister Aroop Biswas.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) released a statement in which it said it was "deeply concerned by the events that transpired at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan". It, however, distanced itself from the event, saying: "This was a private event organised by a PR agency. The AIFF was not involved in the organisation, planning, or execution of this event in any capacity."

ADG (Law and Order) Jawed Shamim subsequently confirmed to reporters that the main organiser of the event, Satadru Dutta, had formally been arrested and an FIR had been lodged in this regard. The CM, meanwhile, said on her X post: "I am constituting an enquiry committee under the chairmanship of Justice (Retd.) Ashim Kumar Ray, with the Chief Secretary and the Additional Chief Secretary, Home and Hill Affairs Department, as members. [sic]"

However, Bengal BJP chief Suvendu Adhikari, in an open letter to Governor C V Ananda Bose, urged him to exercise his constitutional authority to constitute a "truly independent enquiry committee" to probe the matter.

No SC relief for 2024 Mumbai BMW hit-and-run accused

NEW DELHI, DHNS: The Supreme Court has declined to consider the bail plea of Mihir Shah, the son of a former Shiv Sena leader, in the 2024 Mumbai BMW hit-and-run case, saying that "these boys need to be taught a lesson".

A bench noted that the accused belonged to an affluent family and his father was associated with the Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led faction of the Shiv Sena.

"He parks his Mercedes in the shed, takes out his BMW, crashes it and goes absconding. Let him be inside for some time. These boys need to be taught a lesson," the bench observed on Friday while refusing to entertain the bail plea.

Senior advocate Rebecca John, appearing for Shah, said the Bombay High Court allowed him to seek bail after the testimony of key witnesses was recorded in the case.

However, in view of the apex court's observation, she sought permission to withdraw the plea, which was allowed.

Shah (24) was arrested on July 9 last year, two days after he allegedly rammed his BMW car into a two-wheeler in Mumbai's Worli area, killing Kaveri Nakhwa (45) and injuring her husband, Pradeep Nakhwa.

The accused allegedly sped off towards the Bandra-Worli Sea Link after the accident, even as the woman remained on the bonnet of the car. She then got entangled in its wheels and was dragged for more than 1.5 km.

Shah's driver, Rajrishi Bidawat, who was also present in the car at the time of the accident, was arrested on the day of the accident. Both the accused are in judicial custody.

CJI calls for unified judicial policy, stresses role of tech

JAISALMER, PTI: Pushing for a "unified judicial policy", Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday said technology can help align standards and practices across courts, creating a seamless experience for citizens, regardless of their location.

He said high courts, due to the federal structure, have had their own practices and technological capacities, and "regional barriers" can be broken down with technology to create a more unified judicial ecosystem.

Proposing the idea of a "national judicial ecosystem", the CJI urged a comprehensive overhaul of the judicial system through technological integration. "Today, as technology reduces geographical barriers and enables convergence, it invites us to think of justice not as regional systems operating in parallel, but as one national ecosystem with shared standards, seamless interfaces, and coordinated goals."

Politicians trade barbs, fans fume over Messi event fiasco

Blamed for mismanagement, TMC points finger at BJP

ARKADEV GHOSHAL
KOLKATA, DHNS

The vandalism unleashed by angry football fans at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata on Saturday morning had turned into a political slugfest in West Bengal by evening, even as fans said they felt cheated.

While both the BJP and Congress alleged mismanagement by the Trinamool Congress government, the ruling camp alleged that the entire chaos was precipitated by the saffron party.

Bengal BJP chief Suvendu Adhikari, besides writing to the Governor, alleged that fans were cheated on multiple fronts, including having to buy water bottles for Rs 200 because water from outside was not allowed. He said in a post on X, using the TMC's oft-quoted poll slogan, that the "Khela Hobe" circus had turned into "a TMC loot-fest".

The BJP leader also demanded a 100% refund for every gallery ticket holder, the immediate arrest of the sports minister, fire minister and the organiser, and finally, Banerjee's resignation.

Meanwhile, the TMC, on its official X account, shared a video that purported to show some Salt Lake stadium vandals shouting "Jai Shri Ram" and waving saffron flags. It alleged that the "sudden unrest" at the stadium raised "serious concerns, particularly in light of visuals" of "BJP-backed elements carrying saffron flags and raising provocative slogans, apparently attempting to create disorder and malign Bengal's image".

Argentine footballer Lionel Messi with compatriot Rodrigo De Paul (right) and others during the 'G.O.A.T. India Tour 2025' event, in Kolkata on Saturday.. PTI

Meanwhile, West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose was on Saturday evening "denied" entry into the stadium.

Bose described the denial of entry as an affront to the constitutional position of the Governor, and sought a reply from the authorities.

A Bengaluru-based IT professional, who had booked tickets well in advance and travelled all the way to Kolkata, despite being caught up in the IndiGo flight-cancellation fiasco, expressed disappointment with the event's management.

"Today's event shows the state of governance in the state. Every good thing is available to politicians and their bootlickers first. The common man was waiting for a glimpse from the stands," he told *DH*.

Another fan, who attended the event with his family, rued the way the event went down, but thanked his stars that he had left before it all happened.

"Messi is an emotion, and seeing him was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I wanted to share our own demigod of football with my son. A lot was riding on this particular day," he told *DH*.

"I don't want to ramble on the feeling of being monetarily scammed, but I definitely feel cheated in my soul. I didn't expect such a letdown."

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy with Lionel Messi in Hyderabad. PTI

Messi enthralls Hyd

S N V SUDHIR
HYDERABAD, DHNS

After a chaotic start to his India tour in Kolkata, football legend Lionel Messi made a triumphant appearance in Hyderabad on Saturday evening, captivating thousands of fans at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium.

The atmosphere was electric as Messi, accompanied by his Inter Miami teammates Luis Suárez and Rodrigo De Paul, spent nearly an hour on the pitch. The trio played a friendly exhibition game with Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, drawing loud cheers from the packed stands.

The Hyderabad police implemented strict security measures to ensure a smooth event. The arrangements paid off as the evening unfolded peacefully, much to the delight of fans who had turned up in huge numbers for a glimpse of their idol.

Messi greeted the crowd with his trademark warmth, walking around the stadium, waving, and even kicking balls into the stands.

He joined Suárez and De Paul in a brief rondo session with children, showing off his signature skills and playful touch. The trio later met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

"It's an honour to share these moments here in India with you all. Thank you so much for the love and affection," Messi said while thanking supporters for their love and hospitality.

Before he headed to the stadium, Messi took part in a small event at Taj Faluknama Palace, where he also met a few fans.

Info commission back at full strength after 7 yrs

Former law secretary Goyal to head panel

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

NEW JOINEES

- Raj Kumar Goyal appointed head of CIC; 8 new information commissioners
- Goyal to take oath on Monday
- Panel had been headless since September, functioning with just 2 members

Former law secretary Raj Kumar Goyal has been appointed the head of the Central Information Commission (CIC), while eight others — most of them former civil servants — were chosen as information commissioners.

With this, the 11-member CIC acquired full strength for the first time in the past seven years. The central transparency panel has been headless since September and has been working with just two information commissioners — Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari.

Goyal will take oath as the chief information commissioner at 11 am on Monday. President Droupadi Murmu will administer the oath to Goyal, who will later administer the oath to the eight new information commissioners.

The filling of the vacancies came after a meeting of the Selection Committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which also has Home Minister Amit Shah and LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi as members.

At the meeting, Rahul submitted a dissent note claiming that there was no proper representation of "Bahujans", a claim rebutted by the government.

Goyal will be succeeding Heeralal Samariya, the first Dalit chief of the CIC. With the exit of Samariya — who was appointed chief information commissioner on November 6, 2023 — on September 13 as he completed 65 years of age, the CIC became headless for the seventh time in 11 years.

New info commissioners

The new information commissioners include Railway Board chairman Jaya Varma Sinha and Sudha Rani Relangi, who was a member of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board.

With their appointment, the panel will have three women members.

Former Social Justice and Empowerment Secretary Surendra Singh Meena, former Indian Forest Service officer Khushwant Singh Sethi, former IPS officer who worked in Ministry of Home Affairs and Intelligence Bureau Swagat Das, former IAS officer Sanjeev Kumar Jindal and senior journalists PR Ramesh and Ashutlosh Chaturvedi are the other new members in CIC. More than half of the new appointees are former bureaucrats.

'Erasing Gandhi': Cong slams MNREGA renaming

NEW DELHI, DHNS

Congress on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was renaming the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) to "erase Mahatma Gandhi from the national psyche" and to claim credit for the "revolutionary scheme".

It also shared a list of 32 schemes of the Congress-led UPA government that were renamed by the BJP dispensation.

The Union cabinet on Friday approved a Bill to rename the MNREGA as 'Poojya Bapu Grameen Rozgar Yojna' and increase the number of work days.

Senior Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra told reporters that she can't understand what mentality is behind this. "First of all, this is Mahatma Gandhi's name, and when the name is changed, the government's resources are spent again on it. This is a big process that also costs money, so what's the benefit of doing this unnecessarily?" she said.

JAIRAM RAMESH
Congress general secretary

"They hate Pandit Nehru but it seems they also hate Mahatma Gandhi. What's wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi, why rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to Pujya Bapu Employment Guarantee Scheme?

Congress General Secretary KC Venugopal posted on X, "Prime Minister who once called MGNREGA a 'monument of failure' is now renaming it to claim credit for the revolutionary scheme. It's yet another way of erasing Mahatma Gandhi from our national psyche, especially from the villages where he said India's soul resides."

He said this move was "also nothing but a cosmetic change to paper over the deliberate neglect" being meted out to this scheme.

MGNREGA workers have been demanding higher wages, but the Centre has been reducing allocated funds for the scheme year after year, he claimed.

Congress General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said the Modi government is a "master" at renaming schemes and laws.

Sharing the list of 32 schemes and programmes "renamed" by the BJP government, Congress Social Media and Digital Platforms Chairperson Supriya Shrinate said, "Modi's habit of renaming Congress schemes and making them his own is a long-standing one. This is exactly what he has been doing for 11 years — renaming UPA schemes and applying his own stamp to them to garner publicity."

Shah likens Naxalism to 'cobra', vows to end it by 2026

RAIPUR, PTI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday likened Naxalism to a "cobra snake" that spread its hood in the way of development, and said the armed left-wing movement did not benefit anyone - neither those who took up arms nor the security personnel.

Reiterating the Modi government's resolve to end Naxalism by March 31, 2026, he said the Centre has decided to transform the Naxal-hit Bastar division in Chhattisgarh, comprising seven districts, into the most developed tribal region in the country over the next five years.

Addressing the closing ceremony of Bastar Olympic 2025 sport event in Jagdalpur, the headquarter of state's Bastar district, Shah appealed to those associated with the outlawed CPI (Maoist) to lay down arms and join the mainstream of society, asserting that only peace can pave the way for development.

The government has decided to end "red terror" across the country before March 31, 2026, and the goal is now within reach, the Union minister said.

"I came here to participate in Bastar Olympic 2024, again in 2025, and I promise I will come in 2026 as well. When I arrive for the Bastar Olympic in 2026, Naxalism will have been wiped out from Chhattisgarh and the entire country," the home minister said.

Pankaj Chaudhary, an OBC, to be new UP BJP prez

SANJAY PANDEY
LUCKNOW, DHNS

In an apparent bid to counter rival Samajwadi Party's (SP) PDA (pichda, dalit, alpsankhyak) formula, which had brought it considerable success in the state in 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP will appoint influential OBC leader and Union Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, a seven-time MP, as its Uttar Pradesh unit chief.

Chaudhary, who hails from the electorally influential 'Kurmi' community, filed his nomination paper for the state party president's post here on Saturday. Chaudhary's election to the post of the president became a certainty after no other nomination was filed.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal would formally announce Chaudhary's name as the new state party chief on Sunday, according to the BJP sources.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy CMs Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brijesh Pathak and former Union Minister Smriti Irani were among Chaudhary's proposers.

Kurmi leader

BJP sources said that Chaudhary, being a member of the 'Kurmi' community, which was in sizeable numbers in several eastern UP districts, could counter SP's 'PDA' formula, especially in the 'Poorvanchal' region. Assembly elections in the state are due in 2027.

Pankaj Chaudhary after filing nomination for UP BJP president's post, in Lucknow, on Saturday.

BJP's tally in the state in the 2024 LS polls declined to 33 from 62 in 2019.

The SP, which could win only five seats in the 2019 LS polls, managed to win 37 seats. SP nominees fared well in several OC dominated seats in the eastern UP region. The success of the party was then attributed to the PDA formula.

Chaudhary hails from Maharajganj district, which is not very far from Gorakhpur, the hometown of Adityanath.

Incidentally, BJP's alliance partner in UP, the Apna Dal (AD), is also a predominantly 'Kurmi' outfit and has pockets of influence in the eastern UP districts of Varanasi, Mirzapur, Prayagraj, Kaushambi, among others.

MANPOWER GAP

Nearly 23% air traffic controller posts vacant

NEW DELHI, DHNS

India is short of at least 1,260 Air Traffic Controllers (ATCOs), who are trained professionals managing aircraft movements in the sky and on the ground to ensure safety.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has informed the Lok Sabha that 22.75% of ATCO posts are vacant at present. However, it has insisted that no key operational units have been shut down due to manpower shortage.

Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol said in a written reply that air traffic is managed by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) through a total sanctioned strength of 5537 Air Traffic Controllers (ATCOs).

"The deployment of Air Traffic Control Officers (ATCOs) is undertaken by AAI based on the Directorate General of Civil Aviation - Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) on Watch Duty Time Limitations (WDTL), which is as per international norms and also as per air traffic volume at airports so as to ensure safe and efficient air traffic management," he said.

"The total vacancies of ATCOs is 1,260, with 396 vacancies in the Northern Region, 331 vacancies in the Southern Region, 286 vacancies in the Western Region, 199 vacancies in the Eastern Region and 48 vacancies in the North-eastern Region," he said in response to questions by Trinamool Congress MP Rachna Banerjee.

A view of Air Traffic Control (ATC) at Kempegowda International Airport.

EMPTY SPOTS

- India short of at least 1,260 Air Traffic Controllers
- ATCO are trained professionals managing aircraft in the sky, on ground
- AAI has 9,771 vacancies out of 25,730 sanctioned posts.

Safety assured

He said aviation safety is maintained through optimal utilisation of available manpower in accordance with the extant norms and standards. "No key operational units have been shut down due to manpower shortage," he added.

AAI has a total of 9,771 vacancies, including 1,260 ATCOs, out of 25,730 sanctioned posts.

Mohol also said AAI has seven operational ATC personnel training centres, which include three Air Traffic Services Training Organisations (ATSTOs), namely, Civil Aviation Training College (CATC), Prayagraj, Hyderabad Training Centre (HTC), Hyderabad and National Institute of Aviation Training and Management (NIATAM), Gondia and four Regional Training Centres (RTCs) located at Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata.

To a separate question by JMM MP Vijay Kumar Hansdak, the Minister said there are 203 vacancies out of 598 sanctioned posts in the Bureau of Civil Aviation Safety and 794 vacancies out of 1,630 posts in DGCA.

The shortfall in manpower requirements has not impacted the functioning of these organisations, Mohol said, adding that structural and administrative reforms in the aviation sector is a continuous process based on international aviation standards and evolving technological trends.

Toxic air blankets NCR, schools go hybrid

KALYAN RAY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

With air pollution choking the national capital and the air quality index (AQI) nearing the "severe plus" mark, the authorities on Saturday invoked the most stringent set of anti-pollution emergency measures and asked all agencies in the National Capital Region (NCR) to ensure the situation didn't deteriorate.

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) first imposed stage-III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) after Delhi's AQI breached the 400 mark, but within hours upgraded it to GRAP-4 as it hit 448 at 7 pm.

Actions under GRAP-4 entail conducting most classes in schools in hybrid or online modes, a complete halt of construction activities, including the linear public projects like roads, flyovers, and telecommunication network, and severe restrictions on the movement of commercial vehicles and diesel cars.

Thick haze hung over the NCR throughout the day, blocking the sunlight and triggering health complications.

In view of the prevailing trend of air quality and to prevent its further deterioration, the CAQM decided to invoke all actions under GRAP-4 with immediate effect. This was in addition to the actions under Stages I, II & III of GRAP.

The Union government blamed weather conditions for the spike. "The change in the wind direction/pattern since yesterday and winds blowing easterly have further worsened the situation for the PM2.5 concentrations, which is the predominant pollutant during winter and is on the rise," the CAQM noted.

Almost all the AQI stations in the capital are showing PM 2.5 as the predominant pollutant, and the AQI of Delhi has been recorded as 387 at 6.00 am, 393 at 8.00 am and recorded as 401 at 10.00 AM today, already crossing the "Severe" category mark.

At 7 pm, the AQI for Ghaziabad (431), Greater Noida (442) and Noida (455), too, became severe, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

This situation of calm winds, stable atmosphere and unfavourable meteorological conditions is likely to stay for a couple of days as per the forecast from the Indian Meteorological Department. This means no respite from the choking pollution in the next few days.

A day before, the CAQM set up an expert panel to review policies, programmes and regulatory frameworks related to clean mobility, including Bharat Stage norms, electric mobility initiatives and fuel-efficiency standards across Delhi-NCR. It will assess segment-wise contributions of vehicular emissions and related exposure risks.

AIR CLAMPDOWN

- Under GRAP Stage IV, truck entry into Delhi is barred, except for vehicles carrying essential goods or services; CNG, LNG, electric and BS-VI diesel trucks are exempt.
- Delhi-registered BS-IV and older diesel heavy vehicles barred, except for essential services.
- All construction and demolition activities stopped, including linear public projects.
- Schools to run hybrid classes for Classes I-IX and XI in Delhi and worst-hit NCR districts.
- States advised to consider stricter steps if pollution worsens, including college closures, curbs on non-essential businesses and odd-even traffic rules.

CLIMATE CONCERNS Even RSS is making efforts to preserve mountain range

Leaders across party lines push green rethink

SUMIT PANDE
NEW DELHI, DHNS

After its annual general body meeting in March 2019, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) announced it was ready to "take up new initiatives in the field of environment protection and conservation".

Three months later, the BJP, its political wing, won a second consecutive mandate in Delhi, albeit a bigger one. The continuity in government translated to continuity in policies and programmes, leaving little scope for intervention, even from the BJP's ideological mentor.

However, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has, over the years, in his speeches — especially the annual Vijayadashami address — touched upon environmental degradation, calling upon the need to explore alternative economic models that suit the Indian social milieu.

In 2024, the BJP came to power with a reduced mandate. Its dependence on allies is at an all-time high. Meanwhile, a sure-footed RSS, preparing to celebrate its centenary year, too, has started to calibrate its agenda for the coming decades.

In the last week of August this year, top RSS leaders — including Bhagwat and his deputy Dattatreya Hosabale — attended a closed-door meeting in Delhi with a select group associated with the Sangh. BJP representatives were also in attendance.

In this day-long meeting, the former BJP chief and founding member, Murli Manohar Joshi, gave a detailed presentation on India's economic trajectory. Quoting Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, Joshi reportedly underscored the extreme inequalities engendered by the Western economic models.

The site after a portion of a road collapsed, near Bhatwari in Uttarkashi district, Uttarakhand. PTI FILE

Citing natural disasters and flash floods, Joshi, a former Union Minister, also expressed concerns over a "climate emergency", even as he called upon protecting the Himalayas, the world's youngest mountain range that offers natural protection to India's northern frontiers.

Ginger group

Following up on the discussions, a group of citizens, including Joshi and veteran Congress leader Karan Singh, wrote to the then Chief Justice of India, Justice B R Gavai, a month later, seeking a review of the 2021 apex court order allowing the 825-km Char Dham road expansion project in Uttarakhand, mostly along the Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone.

In its judgment, delivered by a five-member bench headed by former Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, the Supreme Court had upheld the government's mandate to broaden three highways — Rishikesh to Mana, Rishikesh to Gangotri, and Tanakpur to Pithoragarh — to facilitate troop movement along the Sino-Indian border.

Urging the courts to protect "whatever little is left to save", the group — comprising politicians, scientists, and environmentalists — termed the Union government's stand, under the garb of defence requirements, "unscientific and irrational".

The letter to the then-CJI cited a study conducted in June this year that pointed out more than 800 landslide zones along the Char Dham route — most created due to the cutting of hills for road-widening.

Backed by the RSS, this ginger group has since crystallised to articulate a cogent alternative development model for India's hill states, especially Uttarakhand.

"Uttarakhand acquires an important place in the Sangh's scheme of things because it is home to some of the most revered pilgrimages for the Hindus world over," said author Arun Anand, who has written on the RSS. "Contrary to the belief that the RSS decides the agenda, it actually picks up issues it feels have a resonance in the masses."

Joshi and Singh, though they come from different ideological backgrounds, enjoy a certain stature in public life. The combination also lends an apolitical hue to the entire movement.

Allahabad University Physics professor-turned-politician Joshi hails from Almora in Uttarakhand. After Narendra Modi's ascension in the BJP, he, along with L K Advani, was relegated to the "Marg Darshak Mandal" in an advisory role.

Meanwhile, Karan Singh, who hails from the erstwhile royal family of Kashmir, has long been associated with environmental issues. He was the minister for civil aviation and environment in the Indira Gandhi Cabinet, which launched Project Tiger in 1973.

Others roped in

For its project to protect the Himalayas, the RSS has channelled some of its affiliates working in the field of environment and conservation. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM), the RSS organ on economy and culture, has also been asked to lend a helping hand.

"Environment and its protection are intrinsically linked to the economic development," said Ashwani Mahajan of the SJM, who was among the signatories of the petition to the CJI.

To expand the scope and appeal of the initiative, leaders from other political outfits have been invited to participate in the efforts. In the last week of November, another meeting of the ginger group was organised in Delhi. It was attended by RSS joint general secretary Krishna Gopal and ideologue and former BJP organisation secretary Govindacharya. Also in attendance was another Congress leader and former MP from Karnataka, Pradip Tamta.

Speaking at the meeting, Joshi reportedly asked, "Does securing the country mean destabilising the Himalayas? Can't there be any other way?"

At the end of the day-long meeting, it was decided to file an appeal in the Supreme Court seeking a review of its December 2021 order.

Hosur airport: 2.9k acres to be acquired from 12 villages

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS

About 3,000 acres of land, including 800 acres of government land, in 12 villages in Tamil Nadu's Krishnagiri district are likely to be acquired for the building of an airport in Hosur.

The move comes after the state government chose the Hosur-Berigai-Bagalur-Shoolagiri quadrilateral to house the airport, being planned to handle about 3 crore passengers annually.

The government last month floated a tender to select a consultant to prepare a Detailed Techno-Economic Report (DTER) for developing the airport.

A detailed Land Development Plan (LDP) derived by the Krishnagiri administration has estimated that the government-owned land parcels in the region amount to 845 acres.

"The plan says 2,134 acres of private land, including agricultural land, have to be acquired for the airport. In total, 2,979 acres are to be acquired for the project," a source in the know told *DH*.

"Once the GO is published, we will start acquiring land. We hope to complete the process by February, but it depends on how fast we get the approvals," said another source.

LAND DETAILS

- The villages are Balavanapalli, Muthali, Adavanapalli, Dasapalli, Pedha Muthali, Attoor, Alenatham, Kaarupalli, Nandimangalam, Soodukondapalli, Midudepalli, and Venkatesapuram
- A detailed Land Development Plan estimates that government-owned land parcels in the region amount to 845 acres
- 2,134 acres of private land, including agricultural land, have to be acquired

The chosen location for the airport — Berigai-Bagalur — is close to the Tamil Nadu section of the Bengaluru Satellite Town Ring Road (STRR). Besides passenger traffic, the government believes the new airport will attract freight traffic, given that Hosur houses over 500 industries and about 3,000 MSMEs.

Though no airport can be built within 150 km of the Bengaluru International Airport till 2033, Tamil Nadu believes it can either work out a deal to get an exemption or operationalise the project after the concessionaire agreement ends.

Ex-IAF officer held in Assam over alleged Pakistan links

TEZPUR, PTI: A retired Indian Air Force personnel has been arrested in Assam's Sonitpur district for alleged links with Pakistani intelligence operatives, police said on Saturday.

Additional Superintendent of Police Haricharan Bhumij said preliminary investigation revealed that the accused had shared sensitive documents and information with Pakistani operatives over social media.

Police have seized his laptop and mobile phone.

The devices have been sent for forensic examination, though some data has been deleted, Bhumij said.

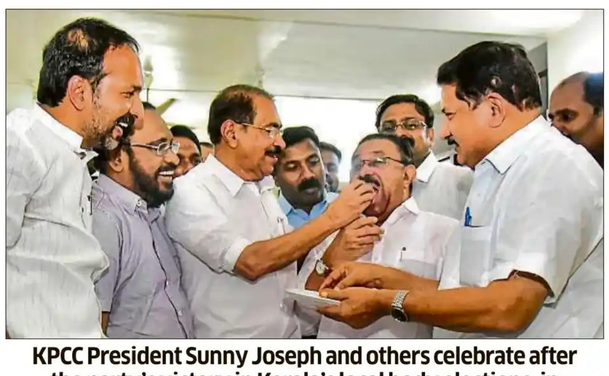
The accused was a junior warrant officer in the IAF and had retired in 2002 from Tezpur's Salonibari base.

He had later joined the electronics department of Tezpur University, but quit.

Kerala polls: Boost for UDF; setback for LDF

Of the 941 grama panchayats, UDF won 505, LDF 340 and NDA 26

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS



KPCC President Sunny Joseph and others celebrate after the party's victory in Kerala's local body elections, in Thiruvananthapuram, on Saturday. PTI

In a major boost before the Assembly elections next year, the Congress-led UDF on Saturday secured a decisive victory in Kerala's local body elections.

The NDA managed to put up an impressive performance by winning the Thiruvananthapuram corporation and two municipalities.

Following the NDA victory in the state capital, PM Modi termed it a "watershed moment" in Kerala's politics and expressed gratitude to the BJP workers for the "spectacular results."

However, the ruling CPM-led LDF suffered a major setback.

Out of the 941 grama panchayats, UDF won 505, LDF 340 and NDA 26. Of the 152 block panchayats, UDF won 79 and LDF 63.

With regard to district panchayats, UDF and LDF won seven each. Among the 87 municipalities, UDF won in 54, LDF 28 and NDA two. UDF won four out of the six corporations, while LDF and NDA got one each. LDF suffered setbacks in many of its strongholds, including the Thiruvananthapuram corporation, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Kannur.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that the reason for the party's setback would be reviewed and corrective measures taken.

"BJP's victory in Thiruvananthapuram and the influence of communal forces in campaigns stress the need to be cautious against attempts by communal forces to mislead people," he said.

Congress leader V D Satheesan said the communal campaigns unleashed by the CPM indeed helped the BJP.

"In Thiruvananthapuram itself, it was CPM's loss that became a gain for BJP," he said.

Rahul Gandhi and party president Mallikarjun Kharge expressed confidence that the UDF would repeat the show in the assembly polls. "These results are a clear sign of growing confidence in the UDF and point the way towards a sweep in the upcoming Assembly election," Rahul said.

The Congress national leadership could have more reasons to cheer as the party performed well in Wayanad, which is represented by Priyanka Gandhi in the Lok Sabha.

UDF won 15 of the 17 seats in the district panchayat while it was a tie last time.

BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar said the saffron party had made major gains in the local body elections, claiming that it received more than 20% of the votes across the state.

UP electoral roll revision is 'NRC in disguise': Akhilesh

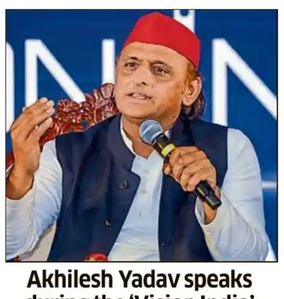
S N V SUDHIR,
HYDERABAD, DHNS

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav has alleged that the Summary Revision of electoral rolls (SIR) being carried out in Uttar Pradesh is 'NRC in disguise', and called it part of a larger conspiracy to remove voters opposed to the BJP.

Speaking to reporters in Hyderabad, where he attended the Vision India – AI Summit on Saturday, Yadav urged the Election Commission to prioritise boosting voter participation instead of facilitating large-scale deletions.

He said the government claims that Uttar Pradesh has a population of about 25 crore, but the BJP is attempting to delete nearly three crore voter names through the SIR.

He called the SIR process 'NRC in disguise', claiming that the government is demanding the same set of documents as those required for the National Register of Citizens (NRC).



Akhilesh Yadav speaks during the 'Vision India' summit, in Hyderabad, on Saturday. PTI

Since it cannot directly implement NRC, the government is using the SIR to achieve the same objective, he alleged.

"More than three crore votes are at risk of being cut in Uttar Pradesh. If such large-scale vote removal happens, and if the BJP and the Election Commission are conspiring to delete votes where the BJP has lost, it amounts to a conspiracy in democracy. This is not the intended purpose of the SIR. This is not SIR. This is NRC in the guise of SIR. They could not directly implement the NRC. Now they have brought the NRC. If the NRC is ever implemented, what documents have to be given? The same papers have to be presented," he said.

Yadav also said his party would use AI to defeat the BJP in the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. He asserted that the SP opposes divisive politics and that its Vision India initiative aims to counter such tendencies. He added that the party believes only in positive, developmental, and progressive politics.

Affirms SP-Cong alliance

Yadav also affirmed that his party's ties with the Congress will continue despite the bloc's defeat in the Bihar Assembly polls and will make efforts to bring all alliance partners together. "We will run the I.N.D.I.A alliance and make efforts to bring the partners of the I.N.D.I.A alliance together," he said.

Delhi blast accused declared 'proclaimed offender'

SRINAGAR, PTI: An NIA court here declared Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Rather, an accused in the white collar terror module busted by Srinagar police in October that was behind the November 10 car blast near Delhi's Red Fort, a proclaimed offender under Section 84 of the BNSS.

The proclamation notice, issued by a special judge designated under the NIA Act last week, was pasted on the house of Rather at Qazigund on Saturday, officials said.

The court has directed Rather to be present before it on January 28, 2026.

Rather, whose brother Dr Adeel Ahmad Rather was arrested in Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh earlier, is believed to be in Afghanistan.

J&K police detain 150 suspects as terror probe widens

SRINAGAR, DHNS: The Jammu and Kashmir Police on Saturday reportedly detained over 150 suspects allegedly linked to proscribed terror outfits, including Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), in a city-wide action across Srinagar, marking a significant tightening of the security grid in the aftermath of the recently exposed "doctor terror module".

The detainees were summoned to their respective police stations across the city and held for questioning as part of what officials described as preventive and intelligence-based measures, sources said.

A police official said the questioning is aimed at verifying specific intelligence inputs related to terror support networks.

"The focus is on mapping networks rather than making immediate arrests," he said, adding that no formal arrests had been announced till late Saturday evening.

YouTuber 'Savukku' Shankar arrested in Chennai

CHENNAI, DHNS: Popular Tamil YouTuber 'Savukku' Shankar, a vociferous critic of the DMK government in Tamil Nadu, was arrested on Saturday by the Chennai Police in connection with a criminal case filed against him.

'Savukku' Shankar

Though the police didn't officially divulge the reason for his arrest, Shankar took to social media to allege that he was being arrested for a Rs 94,000 UPI transaction to one of his employees on Friday night.

High drama was witnessed at the apartment where Shankar lives with his family for about six hours on Saturday after the YouTuber-whistleblower refused to come out of his flat and continued to give updates on his X handle and other platforms.

Shankar, a former government employee who was suspended from the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC), runs a popular YouTube channel, Savukku Media, and is known for his critical views of the DMK dispensation led by Chief Minister M K Stalin. Shankar was arrested at least twice in the past — once he was jailed in a contempt case, and later for allegedly possessing ganja and for his derogatory remarks on women police. Shankar resisted the arrest for hours by not letting the police team inside his flat till the time his lawyers came to the spot.

"This is a failure model government. They kept searching for my phone, and they couldn't find it. They want access to my phone," Shankar said while being arrested.

DIGITAL DIET

Himachal govt bans mobile phones for school students

SHIMLA, PTI

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Saturday announced that there would be a complete ban on students carrying mobile phones in school premises from pre-nursery to Class XII from the upcoming academic session.

"Teachers, however, will be permitted to keep their mobile phones in staff rooms or in their bags" he added.

The CM inaugurated state-of-the-art facilities at the Directorate of Samagra Shiksha, including the Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK), Education Gallery, Programme Management Studio Conference Area, New Conference Hall and a modern central heating system.

Speaking on the occasion, he said these advanced facilities would not only enhance administrative and academic efficiency but would also mark the beginning of a new era of digital education governance in Himachal Pradesh.

"This initiative reflects the visionary approach of the present state government and it will place education at the core of overall development" he remarked.

Teachers will be permitted to keep their phones in staff rooms. REUTERS FILE

The CM claimed that during the last three years, the state government has accorded top priority to the education sector and implemented several decisive reforms, the positive outcomes of which are now clearly visible. He highlighted that Himachal Pradesh has made remarkable progress at the national level by improving its ranking in education quality assessment from the 21st to the 5th position. He further said that the Vidya Samiksha Kendra represents an important milestone in this transformative journey.

Gujarat family held hostage in Libya; Rs 1 crore demanded

SATISH JHA
AHMEDABAD, DHNS

A Gujarati couple and their three-year-old daughter from Mehsana district have allegedly been kidnapped in Libya, with the abductors demanding Rs 1 crore for their release.

The incident came to light after the family approached the authorities seeking urgent intervention to ensure their safe return.

The couple was reportedly attempting to settle in Portugal without valid visas through an agent from Karamsad in the Anand district. They initially flew to Dubai, from where the agent allegedly diverted them to Libya.

Rajya Sabha member Mayank Nayak has written to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar seeking government intervention to rescue the family. Mehsana district officials have also written a letter asking for immediate intervention.

According to these letters, Kismat Chavda, his wife Hina, and their daughter, all residents of Badalpur, left for Dubai on November 29. Their travel agent, Harshit K Mehta, had promised to send them to Portugal. Instead, after reaching Dubai, they were taken to Libya without their consent, where they have been kept in captivity. On December 4, the family received threats demanding a ransom for their release.

In October, four Gujaratis on their way to Australia illegally were kidnapped in Iran. A ransom of Rs 2 crore was sought. They returned safely after the Union government intervened. The agents took them to Delhi, Bangkok, Dubai, and Tehran, where they were held captive.

MAJOR SHIFT It outlines a transactional foreign policy focused on US economic interests

New US Security Strategy signals an emerging world order

SUMIT GANGULY

In late November, the Trump White House unveiled a new National Security Strategy that signals a sharp break from decades of US policy. Analysts on both sides of the Atlantic say the document redraws Washington's strategic map, most notably by no longer treating the defence of Europe — a pillar of US grand strategy since World War II — as a central obligation. More pointedly, it chastises leading European countries for what it sees as their willingness to allow unbridled immigration, which, in the authors' view, could lead to civilisational collapse.

At the same time, while the document extols a commitment to free speech, it rebukes European states for their perceived failure to uphold those principles. Reading between the lines, it is clear that it refers to the efforts of several European countries, most notably Germany, to impose what they regard as legitimate curbs on hate speech.

In a related vein, the strategy fails to mention, let alone highlight, the threat that a revanchist Russia poses to much of Europe. It does, however, emphasise the administration's interest in ensuring that Europe bears a greater share of the burden for its collective defence. While it underscores the importance of protecting national sovereignty, it says nothing about guaranteeing the sovereignty of vulnerable states, most notably Ukraine.

The document also devotes considerable attention to President Trump's domestic priorities, including his stated plans to restore America's industrial capacity, protect American workers from what he considers unfair foreign competition, and end what he views as unfair trade practices. His administration has long articulated these goals, and their reiteration therefore comes as no great surprise.

In discussing other regions, particularly the Middle East and Africa, the strategy unabashedly prioritises the promotion of America's material interests over other objectives. In the Middle East, it highlights President Trump's decision to launch Operation Midnight Hammer, which it claims significantly degraded Iran's nuclear weapons programme. It also notes America's reduced dependence on energy from the region and suggests that the Middle East could instead become a major source and destination for investment, ranging from nuclear energy to artificial intelligence. With regard to Africa, the strategy criticises America's past emphasis on spreading "liberal ideology" and calls instead for an "investment and growth paradigm" aimed at harnessing the continent's abundant mineral resources.

The document further makes clear the administration's desire to maintain American dominance in Latin America, largely to secure access to critical minerals and markets. It also hints darkly at the inroads made by unnamed actors in the region and stresses the perceived need for the US to keep them at bay.

Turning to Asia, the strategy reaffirms America's stated commitment to prevent any unilateral change to Taiwan's status. As in the case of Europe, however, it calls on South Korea and Japan to do more to ensure peace and stability in East Asia. While it highlights intense economic competition with the People's Republic of China (PRC), the document stops short of explicitly describing Beijing as a peer competitor. That said, it does reaffirm America's commitment to the Quadrilateral Security Initiative, or the Quad.

With regard to India, the strategy stresses the need to deepen commercial and strategic ties. Consistent with its broader emphasis on burden-sharing, it urges New Delhi to contribute more to ensuring Indo-Pacific security. How India will respond remains an open question, particularly in light of the highly punitive tariffs the administration has imposed on the country. The document also repeats President Trump's frequent assertion that he played a decisive role in ending the post-Pahalgam India–Pakistan crisis. Several overarching themes emerge from the strategy. Most notably, it makes no pretence of a commitment to multilateralism. Equally striking is the absence of any discussion of the existential threat posed by climate change, or of ways to mitigate its likely consequences.

Another defining feature is its unapologetic emphasis on advancing America's material interests worldwide. At the same time, it offers no affirmation of a commitment to foreign assistance, whether bilateral or multilateral. If anything, such efforts are dismissed as misguided.

Beyond these elements, a clear leitmotif runs through the document: the administration's approach to the world is explicitly transactional. The United States will work with friends and allies only when doing so is deemed beneficial to Washington, DC. Any vestige of altruism that may have characterised earlier national security strategies has been entirely cast aside.

Finally, a tone of grievance permeates the text. It reflects a belief that, for years if not decades, other countries have sought to exploit the United States. This strategy appears designed to ensure that such perceived exploitation comes to an end. For the world's wealthiest and most powerful country to adopt such a petulant stance is a sobering commentary on the current state of its leadership.

(The writer is a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and directs the Huntington Programme on Strengthening US–India Relations)

US President Donald Trump gestures as he arrives to deliver remarks on the US economy and affordability in Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania. REUTERS FILE

WORLD AT A GLANCE

A worker removes mud from buses near a landslide-affected area after Cyclone Ditwah in Maspanna, Sri Lanka, on Saturday. AFP

2 US service members, 1 American civilian killed in Syria ambush

Two US service members and one American civilian were killed and three other people wounded in an ambush on Saturday by a lone member of the Islamic State group in central Syria, AP/PTI reports from Damascus (Syria).

The attack on US troops in Syria is the first to inflict casualties since the fall of President Bashar Assad a year ago. US Military Central Command said in a post on X that as a matter of respect for the families and in accordance with Department of Defence policy, the identities of the service members will be withheld until 24 hours after their next of kin have been notified. US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth posted on X: "Let it be known, if you target Americans — anywhere in the world — you will spend the rest of your brief, anxious life knowing the United States will hunt you, find you, and ruthlessly kill you." The shooting took place near historic Palmyra, according to the state-run SANA news agency, which earlier said two members of Syria's security force and several US service members had been wounded. The casualties were taken by helicopter to the al-Tanf garrison near the border with Iraq and Jordan.

Nobel laureate Bialiatski freed

Belarusian authorities have released Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and key opposition figure Maria Kolesnikova from prison, Pavel Sapelka, human rights advocate with the Viasna rights group, AP/PTI reports from Vilnius (Lithuania).

Their release comes as authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko seeks to improve relations with Washington. The US earlier on Saturday announced lifting sanctions on the country's potash sector. In exchange for sanctions relief, Lukashenko pardoned 123 prisoners, the Belta state news agency reported. A close ally of Russia, Minsk has faced Western isolation and sanctions for years. Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 9.5 million with an iron fist for more than three decades, and the country has been repeatedly sanctioned by Western countries both for its crackdown on human rights and for allowing Moscow to use its territory in the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Israel kills senior Hamas commander Raed Saed

He was one of the key planners of the October 2023 attacks on Israel

CAIRO/JERUSALEM, REUTERS

The Israeli military killed senior Hamas commander Raed Saed, one of the architects of the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel, in a strike on a car in Gaza City on Saturday, several Israeli media outlets reported, citing sources.

The attack killed four people and wounded at least 25 others, according to Gaza health authorities. There was no immediate confirmation from Hamas or medical officials that Saed was among the dead. The Israeli military said it had targeted a senior Hamas commander in Gaza City but did not provide a name or further details.

If Saed was killed, it would mark the highest-profile assassination of a senior Hamas figure since a ceasefire deal came into effect in October.

An Israeli defence official said Saed had been targeted in the attack, describing him as the head of Hamas's weapons manufacturing force.

Hamas sources have also described Saed as the second-in-command of the group's armed wing, after Izz el-Deen al-Hadad.

Those sources said Saed previously headed Hamas's Gaza City battalion, one of the group's largest and best-equipped units.

The Israeli military said two of its soldiers were earlier injured by an explosive device that "detonated during an operation to clear the area" of militant infrastructure.

Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a car in Gaza City on Saturday. AFP

Israeli settlements growing at highest level since 2017

The United Nations said that the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank is at its highest level since 2017, AFP reports. In 2025, "plans for nearly 47,390 housing units were advanced, approved, or tendered, compared with some 26,170 in 2024," the UN report said.

B'desh interim govt orders security clampdown

DHAKA, PTI: Bangladesh's interim government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, on Saturday ordered a nationwide security clampdown as fresh unrest gripped the country following the shooting of a right-wing cultural group's youth leader.

Inquilab Mancha leader Sharif Osmann Hadi, who is also a candidate in the February 12 general elections, was shot on Friday as he launched his campaign in Dhaka's central Bijoynagar area. Doctors said his condition is critical.

"The government is going to start the second phase of Operation Devil Hunt to help ensure public safety and combat the growing threat of illegal arms," Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (Retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said. The interim government first launched Operation Devil Hunt in February this year following protests over an attack on a former minister's private residence in a northern suburb of the capital. The operation targeted alleged "henchmen" and supporters of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's now-disbanded Awami League.

3 US lawmakers introduce resolution to end 50% tariffs on India

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, PTI

Three US lawmakers have introduced a resolution in Congress seeking to end the tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on India, arguing that the "irresponsible tariff strategy" towards New Delhi is counterproductive and "weakens a critical partnership".

Representatives Deborah Ross of North Carolina, Marc Veasey of Texas and Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois introduced the resolution on Friday in the House of Representatives to terminate Trump's national emergency declaration authorising tariffs of up to 50% on imports from India, a move they say would help restore Congress's constitutional authority over trade.

Trump has imposed tariffs of up to 50% on Indian goods, including a 25% levy linked to India's purchases of Russian oil. The resolution seeks to end the national emergency invoked by Trump to impose sweeping tariffs on Indian goods under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and to rescind the additional 25% "secondary" duties that took effect on August 27, on top of earlier reciprocal tariffs.

Taken together, these measures raised duties on many Indian-origin products to 50%, according to a statement issued by Ross.

Krishnamoorthi said Trump's "irresponsible tariff strategy towards India is a counterproductive approach that weakens a critical partnership".

"Instead of advancing American interests or security, these duties disrupt supply chains, harm American workers and drive up costs for consumers. Ending these damaging tariffs will allow the US to engage with India to advance our shared economic and security needs," the Indian-American lawmaker said.

The resolution follows a bipartisan, Senate-passed measure to end Trump's Brazil tariffs and rein in what lawmakers describe as his abuse of emergency powers to raise duties on imports, the statement said.

Director James Cameron attends the Australasian premiere of "Avatar Fire and Ash" in Wellington on Saturday. AFP

Thai-Cambodia fight rages on

Fighting raged Saturday morning along the border of Thailand and Cambodia, even after US President Donald Trump, acting as a mediator, declared that he had won agreement from both countries for a new ceasefire, AP/PTI reports from Surin (Thailand).

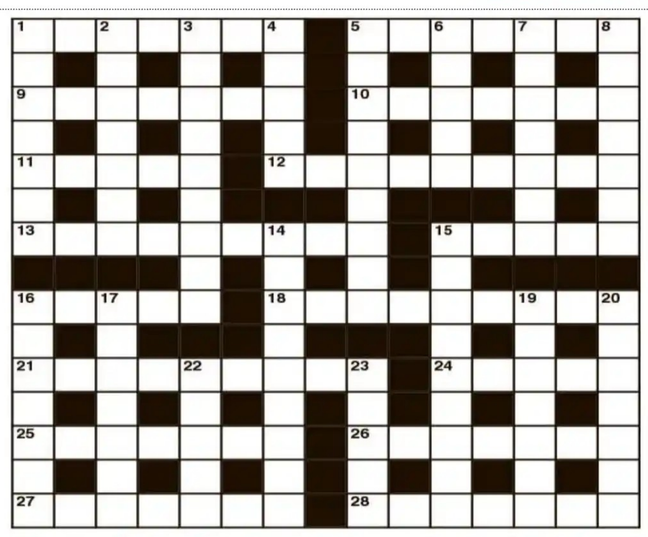
Thai officials said they did not agree to a ceasefire. Cambodia has not commented directly on Trump's claim, but its defence ministry said Thai jets carried out airstrikes Saturday morning. Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said Saturday that some of Trump's remarks didn't "reflect an accurate understanding of the situation." He said Trump's characterisation of a land mine explosion that wounded Thai soldiers as a "roadside accident" was inaccurate, and did not reflect Thailand's position."

Sanskrit courses in Pak varsities

For the first time since Partition, two universities in Pakistan's Punjab province have launched short courses in Sanskrit, citing a shared cultural heritage and plans to teach the Gita and the Mahabharata in the future, PTI reports from Lahore.

The public University of the Punjab, Lahore, and the private Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) have introduced a three-month course in the classical language. Instructors also plan to draw on a significant archival collection of Sanskrit manuscripts housed at Punjab University for future research.

◆ SUNDAY CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 2658 ◆



ACROSS
1 Highest in rank (7)
5 Bareheaded (7)
9 Helicopter (7)
10 Highly enthusiastic (7)
11 Ooze out (5)
12 Freedom and scope (5-4)
13 As it were (2,2,5)
15 Brightness (5)
16 Gaudy (5)
18 American Mafia boss (9)
21 Ahead of the field (2,3,4)
24 Haggard (5)
25 Frightful (7)
26 Estimation (7)
27 Green variety of beryl (7)
28 Avoiding the issue (7)

DOWN
1 Favourable outcome (7)
2 Quantity got by multiplying (7)
3 On purpose (9)
4 Strangely frightening (5)
5 Not fully worked out (4-5)
6 Flung (5)
7 Fence in (7)
8 Proverbially wise king (7)
14 Keen sighted (5-4)
15 An imaginary paradise (7-2)
16 Small pebbles on beach (7)
17 Stare down (7)
19 Famous US escapologist (7)
20 Train of attendants (7)
22 Especially (5)
23 Monotonous hum (5)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 4018

CRYPTIC
ACROSS: 8, S-tood on 9, Fellow man 13, Li-B-ra 14, Beams 15, M-Ag-enta 16, B-reath-e 17, Ar-ti-e 18, E-I-G-ht (rev) 20, Scour 22, B-est-ow 23, P-I'll-ar 25, Re-trace 27, Sta-gge-r (rev) 30, Risque 31, Sprai-N 32, Mined (mind) 35, Spend 36, Teems (teams) 37, Sack-but 39, M-acabr-e 41, Wat-c-h 42, Leads 43, Minus-cule 44, Con-sent.
DOWN: 1, Stabl-E 2, No matter 3, Double's back 4, Sensation 5, Slu-MB-er 6, Swag-gering 7, Ma-I-n 10, Glo-be-s 11, Mal-aise 12, Patter 19, Gall-eon 21, Over-see 24, Stone's-throw 26, Round-about 28, Sp-eedw-ell 29, B-as-s-ets 30, R-esum-e 32, Much less 33, De(nim)-test 34, Stretch 38, B-rainy 40, Chip.

EASY
ACROSS: 8, Fanatic 9, Flowchart 13, Balsa 14, Gouda 15, Runaway 16, Cardiff 17, Earth 18, March 20, Satin 22, Louise 23, Unison 25, Disrobe 27, Boulder 30, Angels 31, Remote 32, Discs 35, Corgi 36, Bower 37, Suffice 39, Voyages 41, Radio 42, Noise 43, Antipathy 44, Statute.
DOWN: 1, Tailor 2, Vacation 3, King of clubs 4, Albatross 5, Swarthy 6, Phenomenal 7, Brow 10, Abacus 11, Tuneful 12, Python 19, Rashers 21, Trigger 24, Boxer shorts 26, Rolling pin 28, Seaworthy 29, Corrode 30, Alcove 32, Definite 33, Stereo 34, Abysmal 38, Idiots 40, Yank.

SU DO KU X - 3765

		7			6	9		
2		8				7		
		5		2				8
				8			5	
			6	5	4			1
						1		
		1		4				9
					2		4	7

SOLUTION TO 3764

5	6	8	4	9	3	2	1	7
2	3	7	5	8	1	4	6	9
4	1	9	2	7	6	5	3	8
9	4	2	1	6	8	3	7	5
3	5	6	7	2	9	8	4	1
8	7	1	3	5	4	6	9	2
6	8	4	9	1	5	7	2	3
7	9	5	6	3	2	1	8	4
1	2	3	8	4	7	9	5	6

To solve the puzzle:
The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.

Raiza Dhillon

Olympian Dhillon claims golden double in skeet

NEW DELHI, PTI: Paris Olympian Raiza Dhillon gave a commanding performance on way to clinching the skeet gold in both women's senior and junior categories in the National Shooting Championship here on Saturday.

The 21-year-old shot 56 in the women's final to secure the top-podium place ahead of Yashasvi Rathore, who settled for silver with 55.

Fellow Olympian Ganemat Shekhon finished third after shooting down 45 targets. Darshna Rathore (36), Risham Kaur Guron (27) and Vanshika Tiwari (18) finished fourth, fifth and sixth respectively.

Earlier, Yashavi topped the standings with 118 hits while Raiza and Ganemat shot 116 each, with the former finishing second on a shoot-off score of plus-5, while Ganemat was placed third at plus-4.

DYES A, Canara Bank in final

Bengaluru, DHNS: In a closely-fought contest, Aryan Uthappa MT's second goal in the 55th minute helped Department of Youth Empowerment & Sports A pull off a narrow 4-3 victory over South Western Railway, Hubballi to enter the final of the Namdhari Cup hockey tournament on Saturday.

Results: Semifinal: DYES A: 4 (Shivakumarayya V Pujar 1st, Aryan Uthappa MT 24th, 55th, Vrushab R 28th) bt South Western Railway, Hubballi: 3 (Kumar N 19th, Punith R 25th, Bharath KR 40th); Canara Bank: 5 (Bipin BR 21st, Vinaya VS 33rd, Pradhan Somanna 35th, Pruthvi Raj GN 47th, Likhith BM 56th) bt Hockey Ballari: 1 (Raghunath VR 14th).

◆ ON TV ◆

CRICKET

3rd T20I: India vs South Africa **(7 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports Network, JioHotstar.**

U-19 Asia Cup: UAE vs Malaysia, India vs Pakistan **(both 10:30 am)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network & SonyLIV.**

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy: Mumbai vs Haryana **(9 am)**, Andhra Pradesh vs Punjab **(11 am)**, Hyderabad vs Rajasthan **(1:30 pm)**, Madhya Pradesh vs Jharkhand **(4:30 pm)**. **LIVE Star Sports Network, JioHotstar.**

FOOTBALL

EPL: Crystal Palace vs Manchester City, Sunderland vs Newcastle, Nottingham Forest vs Tottenham, West Ham vs Aston Villa **(all 7:30 pm)**, Brentford vs Leeds United **(10 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports Network.**

La Liga: Sevilla FC vs Real Oviedo **(6:30 pm)**, RC Celta Vigo vs Athletic Bilbao **(8:45 pm)**, Levante vs Villareal CF **(11 pm)**, Deportivo Alaves vs Real Madrid **(1:30 am, Monday)**. **LIVE** on **FanCode.**

CRICKET T20I SERIES

Gill, SKY under pressure to deliver

Duo will be hoping to end their barren run in third game

DHARAMSALA, PTI

The countdown to save his place in the playing XI begins for a beleaguered Shubman Gill, who is likely to get three matches against South Africa to prove his worth before the Indian team management switches to a 'Plan B' ahead of the T20 World Cup, starting in six weeks.

As India gear up to play the third T20I against the Proteas on Sunday in sub-10-degree temperatures in the lap of the ice-clad Dhauladhar range, things are suddenly heating up in the Indian dressing room, with the prolonged poor form of skipper Suryakumar Yadav coming under the scanner. Worse, his deputy Shubman Gill, who was pushed into the XI at the expense of a settled Sanju Samson, is not inspiring much confidence.

The South African pace attack featuring Anrich Nortje, Marco Jansen, Lungi Ngidi, Ottniel Baartman and Lutho Sipamla has shown how to bowl on Indian tracks, and the HPCA Stadium strip, offering extra bounce and some movement off the surface, will certainly keep them interested.

Among all T20 sides, South Africa, in terms of personnel, appears to have the requisite balance to win the trophy in the Indian subcontinent this time. Quinton de Kock's return, along with the likes of Aiden Markram, Dewald Brevis, Donovan Ferreira, David Miller and all-rounder Jansen, gives their batting an intimidating look. With only eight games, starting from the third T20I, left before the start of the T20 World Cup title defence, India's under-fire head coach Gautam Gambhir won't be able to afford two out-of-form top-order batters in the starting line-up.

Being the skipper of the side, Suryakumar will certainly have immunity going into the T20 World Cup despite being completely out of form for the past one year but same can't be said about Gill, who wasn't the original choice as an opener.

Gill's entry into the T20 setup was a classic case of trying to fix something that ain't broken and things haven't looked good so far. In this backdrop, Gill would need to bat out of his skin to prove that Ajit Agarkarled committee wasn't wrong in throwing Samson under the bus for one bad series against England.

The stylish Indian Test and ODI skipper will have to find his T20 game and at least score in two of the three matches if he doesn't want Samson to get his rightful place back or for that matter, find Yashasvi Jaiswal, with a fabulous T20I strike-rate of 165, enter the fray during New Zealand series.

India's Jitesh Sharma (left) and Shubman Gill during a training session ahead of the third T20I against South Africa at the HPCA Stadium in Dharamsala on Saturday. PTI

LIVE 7 PM, STAR SPORTS NETWORK, JIOHOTSTAR

While head coach Gambhir is too proud a person to admit but sending Axar Patel as a one drop batter during the second T20I was a "tactical brain fade" from the team's think-tank.

The kind misstep that was taken with Axar's promotion is unlikely to be repeated in the third game where skipper is expected to go back to No. 3 where he has got a lot of success in his first few years at the international level.

Similarly, Shivam Dube being sent at number eight due to the shuffling of batting order was another poor call which would need course correction in the next game.

Kuldeep Yadav is one bowler who has consistently troubled the Proteas batter but in an Indian team where batting till No. 8 is non-negotiable, the left-arm wrist spinner often finds himself getting the rough end of the stick.

At Dharamsala too, he might have to sit out as Kuldeep and Varun Chakravarthy, two non-batters can't be clubbed in the same T20 playing eleven as that would lead to compromise in batting depth.

While Arshdeep hasn't had a good series so far, it will be interesting to find if team management can find a place for Kuldeep in the playing eleven with Hardik Pandya sharing the new ball with Jasprit Bumrah.

The five-match series is currently tied 1-1.

'Players ready to bat anywhere'

Batter says adaptability has become India's key requirement in T20Is

DHARAMSALA, PTI

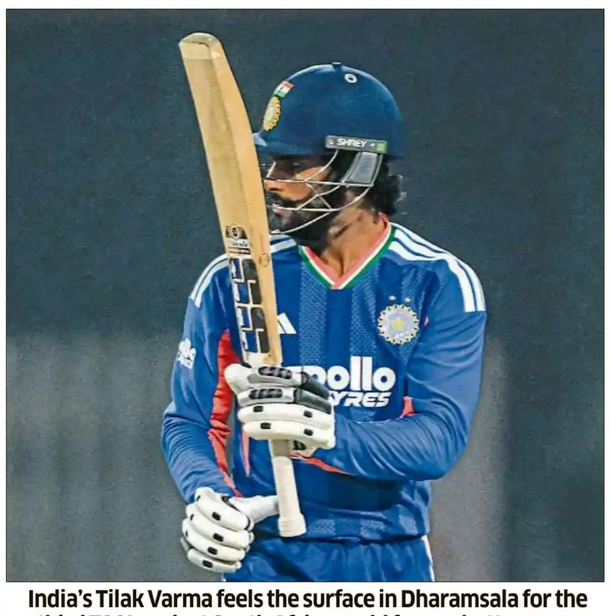
India batter Tilak Varma on Saturday underlined the team management's push for a flexible batting order, saying most players are ready to bat anywhere depending on match situations.

The hosts eye an edge in the five-match T20I series against South Africa, locked 1-1 ahead of the third game to be played here on Sunday.

With India continuing to experiment in the middle-order in the build-up to next year's T20 World Cup, Tilak said adaptability has become a key requirement in the shortest format.

"Everyone is flexible except the openers. I am up for batting at 3, 4, 5 or 6 — wherever the team prefers for me," Tilak said during the pre-match press conference.

"If the team feels a particular move is tactically best, everyone goes with the team."



India's Tilak Varma feels the surface in Dharamsala for the third T20I against South Africa could favour batters. AFP

Drawing parallels with recent examples, Tilak said such decisions are situation-based rather than role-driven.

"One-off games keep happening. Axar Patel has already done the same thing and he did well there. It depends on the situation," he said, citing examples of similar roles being successfully executed in recent international tournaments.

Providing context to the conditions in Dharamsala, the 23-year-old said the surface could still favour batters despite the cold weather.

"I have played an Under-19 India series here before. We are watching the wicket and I feel it will be a high-scoring one," he said.

However, he cautioned that low temperatures could offer some help to bowlers early on.

With dew expected to play a role as the match begins at 7 pm, Tilak said India are mentally prepared for the challenge.

"We don't have the toss in our hands. We are preparing for the dew and have practised with a slightly wet ball," he said.

Addressing concerns about playing in unfamiliar cold conditions, Tilak said mental strength is key.

"It's very cold here, but we are prepared mentally and physically. Those who are mentally strong succeed everywhere," he said.

Tilak added that moving across the batting order does not affect his preparation.

"We follow the basics in practice. I always think about what I can do for the team," he said.

On the toss factor, Tilak felt batting first or second may not make a major difference.

"In the first two matches, the team batting first won because there was some seam and swing in the cold. Overall, there isn't much difference as dew comes in early," he said.

Confident of India's approach, the left-hander said the side would stick to its attacking template.

"We will play with the same intent we have shown in the last 15-20 matches. We are confident of winning the series," he said.

Vijaya CC under-14 lads emerge champions

BENGALURU, DHNS: Vijaya Cricket Club rode on a complete team performance to defeat Social Cricketers by 51 runs in the final of the KSCA Group I - I, II and III Division under-14 inter-club tournament here at the India Air Force ground.

After huffing and puffing to post 190/8 in 50 overs, Vijaya CC's Ved Nahar (2/23), Ahaan Dash (2/24), Shaan M Begur (2/24) and S Rahul Raju (2/16) bagged two wickets apiece as they bowled out Social Cricketers for 139 in 45.2 overs.

Winning the toss, Vijaya CC skipper Ved Nahar had no hesitation is batting first. The decision seemed to backfire when they lost opener Pranav Jadagoudar in the fifth over itself. Nahar's opening partner Ahaan Dash (65), however, steadied the ship with an 56-run partnership along with Gagan R Metre. Just when things were looking good, Metre was run out.

Brief scores: Vijaya Cricket Club: 190/8 in 50 overs (Ahaan Dash 65, Krishna Rajput 26, Ved Nahar 40) bt Social Cricketers: 139 all out in 45.2 overs (Hridaan Sai 41, Vastvik Sharma 26; Ved Nahar 2-23, Ahaan Dash 2-24, Shaan M Begur 2-24, S Rahul Raju 2-16).

Vijaya Cricket Club, winners of the KSCA Group I - I, II and III Division under-14 inter-club tournament. STANDING (from left): Ahaan Dash, Gagan R Metre, Chirag KN, Vish Raddi, Pranav J, Sahars, Tanush Mishra and Rahul S Raj. SITTING: Ved Nahar (captain), Suraj D (coach), K Jeshwant Karthik (head coach), Sachin Shinde (coach), Ashwin Ram (coach), Aniket Chaturvedi. SQUATTING: Krishna Rajput , Shaan M Begur, Viren S, Arjun Sunil.

Polin, Krishna power DPS to massive win

BENGALURU, DHNS: K Hrithik Polin slammed an unbeaten double century and team-mate Krishna scored a 'daddy hundred' as Delhi Public School, East trounced Frank Anthony Public School by 408 runs in the BT Ramaiah Shield under-14 school 1st Division match.

LOCAL CRICKET

Brief scores: Delhi Public School, East: 497/3 in 50 overs (Anirudh Venkata Rayasam 75, K Hrithik Polin 201 n.o., Krishna 191 n.o.; Dheeraj B 2-98) bt Frank Anthony Public School: 89 all out in 37.1 overs (Mohammed Umair 53, Dheeraj B 25; Ashwwath Nagarajan 2-11, Vishist PJ 2-16, Krishna 2-20, Saurjyesh Das 2-12).

Delhi Public School, South: 199/9 in 50 overs (Siddharth Ram Narayan 26,
Hannan Zaki Ahmad 31, Viresh Moktan 42; Yedwath Bharathwaj 2-33, Akhilesh Pradhan 2-25, Pratham Sanjeev Kulkarni 3-18) bt BGS National Public School: 152 all out in 41 overs (Sangeeta Rao Sashang 34, J Jasim Rahman 28; Syed Hammad Ulla 3-43).

Presidency School, RT Nagar: 175 all out in 43.1 overs (Arnav Rajiv VP 34, Shubhan Hiremath 40, Varun Kumar MG 29; Eric Rupreo 3-31, Vedanth S 2-17) lt to Gopalan National School: 176/8 in 46.2 overs (Mahmad Salman 2-29, Varun Kumar MG 2-42, Gavish 2-22).

St Joseph's Boys High School: 397/3 in 50 overs (Prabhav Pydah 206, SM Bhavith 49, M Kanishk Reddy 81 n.o., Naksh CM 29; Chakali Karthik 2-64) bt St Joseph's Indian High School: 159/9 in 50 overs (BA Gowri Shankar 40, Skandavarma Patil K 37; Piyush Raj L 4-25, Abhijit Sen 2-27).

Sri Kumaran Children's Home, CBSE: 131/7 in 50 overs (Shrutik Ghosh 52 n.o., Tejas Sudhindra Bhat 2-15) lt to Poorna Vikasa Vidyalaya: 132/3 in 16.2 overs (Sharav Chetan Koundinya 50, Sachith Shetty 44 n.o.; Sai Krisheek 2-19).

Sukurth, Suvik put Karnataka in command

BENGALURU, DHNS: Sukurth J and Suvik Gill picked up four-wicket hauls as Karnataka drove to a position of strength against Uttarakhand on the second day of their Elite group match of the Vijay Merchant Trophy in Bhilai, Chhattisgarh on Saturday.

At stumps, Rohith (43 not out) and Arush Jain (37 not out) helped Karnataka reach 83/1 in 22 overs, leading Uttarakhand by 220 overs.

Earlier on, resuming at their overnight score of 275 for nine, Karnataka were bowled out for 287 in 95 overs.

A hapless Uttarakhand, in their first essay were folded for a mere 150 in 59.4 overs, thanks to Sukurth (4/48) and Suvik (4/11) sharing eight wickets between them.

Brief scores: Karnataka: (O/n: 275/9): 287 all out 95 overs (Arush Jain 135., Sukurth J 39; Abhimanyu 5-91, Aarav Gupta 2-63, Shaurya Malyal 2-32) & 83/1 in 22 overs (Rohith M 43, Arush Jain 37 vs Uttarakhand: 150 all out in 59.4 overs (Anaya Negi 45, Siddharth Tomar 35, Rakesh 26, Sukurth J 4-48, Suvik Gill 4-11)

Rachitha powers K'taka

BENGALURU, DHNS: Rachitha Hatwar's ton well-supported by Shreya S Chavan's half-century along with Vandita K Rao four-wicket haul propelled Karnataka to a 29-run win over Vidarbha in the BCCI Under-19 Women's ODI Trophy at the NFC Ground in Hyderabad.

Batting first, Rachitha hammered 156 runs off 154 balls while Vandita added 57 off 69 balls in Karnataka 284 for seven in 50 overs.

Later, Shraddha Nabira (71) and Akshara (72) scored half-centuries each to lead Vidarbha's fight back. However, Karnataka bowlers led by Vandita's 4/49 and aided by Deeksha J's 3/53 made things difficult for their opponents' batters before eventually bowling them out for 255 in 48.1 overs.

Brief scores: Karnataka: 284/7 in 50 overs (Rachitha Hatwar 156, Liyanka Shetty 27, Shreya S Chavan 57; Nimisha K 2-61, Shweta Tiwari 2-52, Dhanashree Gujar 2-46) bt Vidarbha: 255 all out in 48.1 overs (Riddhima Maradwar 33, Sakshi P Bhupal 26, Shraddha Nabira 71, Akshara 72; Deeksha J 3-53, Vandita K Rao 4-49).

Aman, Sujeet clinch freestyle golds

AHMEDABAD, PTI

Olympic bronze medallist Aman Sehrawat and Sujeet clinched gold medals in men's freestyle 61kg and 65kg categories respectively on the second day of the Senior National Wrestling Championship here on Saturday.

With their triumphs, the duo secured their spots in the selection trials for upcoming international competitions.

In the 57kg category, U23 world champion Chirag lost his semifinal bout to U20 Worlds medallist Ankush.

RSPB won the Championship Trophy with 160 points, while SSCB finished runners-up with 155 points. Haryana secured the third position with 135 points.

The Greco-Roman competitions will begin on Sunday.

Results: 57kg: Ankush (Del), gold; Aatish (RSPB), silver; Akshay (Mah) and Chirag (Har), bronze.
61kg: Aman (RSPB), gold; Nikhil (Del), silver; Deepak (SSCB) and Anuj (Raj), bronze.

Aman Sehrawat

65kg: Sujeet (Har), gold; Vishal Kaliraman (RSPB), silver; Rohit (SSCB) and Vijay Malik (Chd), bronze.
70kg: Abhimanyu (Har) gold; Ravi (UP), silver; Rohan (RSPB) and Rohit (MP), bronze.
74kg: Chandermohan (SSCB) gold; Deepak (Har) silver; Vikas Yadav (UP) and Adarsh (Mah), bronze.
79kg: Amit (SSCB), gold; Mohit (Del) silver; Sachin Mor (RSPB) and Rahul (Raj), bronze.
86kg: Mukul Dahiya (SSCB), gold; Sachin (Har), silver; Sandeep Singh (Pub) and Aman Singh (Guj), bronze.
92kg: Jointy (RSPB), gold; Sachin (Har), silver; Sahil Jaglan (SSCB) and Deepak (Raj), bronze.
97kg: Vicky (RSPB). gold; Deepak Chahal (Del), silver; Sahil (Pub) and Vetal (Mah), bronze.
125kg: Dinesh (SSCB), gold; Ronak Dahiya (Del), silver; Mahender (RSPB) and Raju (Chd), bronze.

India into first-ever World Cup final

CHENNAI, PTI: India came up with a spirited performance to beat two-time champions Egypt 3-0 and make their maiden appearance in the Squash World Cup final, here on Saturday.

Seeded second, India will take on Hong Kong China, who got the better of Japan in the other top-four clash, in the summit clash at the Express Avenue Mall.

National champion and 45th-ranked Velavan Senthilkumar swiftly got India off the blocks by defeating world No. 96 Ibrahim Elkabbani 7-1, 7-3, 7-6 before the country's top-ranked women's player Anahat Singh (world No. 28) made it 2-0 with a tough 6-7, 7-5, 7-3, 3-7, 7-3 win over 44th-ranked Nour Heikal.

This was India's best showing in the tournament after they reached the semifinals in 2023 when they had lost to Malaysia to settle for bronze.

Dean-Gagan seize early advantage

BENGALURU, DHNS

The storied Karnataka 1000 Rally roared back to life with high drama on the first day as TSI Racing's Dean Mascarenhas and co-driver Gagan Karumbaiah seized the early advantage, leading a strong one-two for the team alongside Aditya Thakur and Virender Kashyap at the K1000 Rally, the fourth round of the Blueband FMSCI Indian National Rally Championship (INRC) near Gubbi.

Defending champions Karna Kadur and seasoned co-driver Musa Sherif had mechanical issued in Special Stage 3 while another former double champions Amittrajit Ghosh and Ashiwn Naik, took had to pack up in SS1.

Fresh from back-to-back victories in Kodagu that vaulted them to the top of the overall championship standings, the Mangaluru–Kodagu pairing of Dean and Gagan combined controlled aggression with precision to top the timesheets. Driving an imported Peugeot 208 RS prepared by PH Sport, Dean kept a measured approach on the tight, technical stages.

The day, however, delivered a setback for defending champions Karna Kadur and Musa Sherif. The Arka Motorsports duo was running third until a mechanical issue struck late, forcing them down the order. Capitalising on the opportunity, teammates Philippos Matthai and KN Harish, supported by MRF, moved into third overall and took command of the INRC 2 category after three special stages. Arka's Harikrishan Wadi and Kunal Kashyap followed closely in INRC 2, with the Kerala pairing of Fabid Ahmer and Milen George Cherian completing the top three. In INRC 3, Shashank Jamwal and Raghuram Saminathan of Chettinad Sporting enjoyed a trouble-free run to lead the class, ahead of teammates Vishak B–Chiranth Jain and Jenu Johnson–Lenin Joseph.

The INRC 3T category saw a confident performance from Naveen Puligilla and Santhosh R. Thomas, who topped the class on Day 1.

Naveen arrives at K1000 riding a wave of confidence after a recent World Rally Championship (WRC3) podium finish in Saudi Arabia, underlining his growing stature on the international stage.

Dean Mascarenhas and Gagan Karumbaiah lead the Karnataka 1000 Rally after the first day.

Provisional results: Overall: Dean Mascarenhas (Mangalore)/ Gagan Karumbaiah (Coorg) 45:48.8, 1; Adithya Thakur/ Virendar Kashyap (Both Himachal) 46:27.9, 2; Philippos Matthai (Delhi)/ KN Harish (Bengaluru) 48:01.4, 3.
INRC2: Philippos Matthai (Delhi)/ KN Harish (Bengaluru) 48:01.4, 1; Harikrishan Wadia (Delhi)/ Kunal Kashyap (Shimla) 48:18.5, 2; Fabid Ahmer/Milen George (both Kerala) 49:16.6, 3.
INRC3: Shashank Jamwal (Himachal)/ Raghuram S (Coimbatore) 48:17.8, 1; Vishak B (Kerala)/Chiranth Jain (Karkala) 49:02.8, 2; Jenu Johnson (Mysore)/ Lenin Joseph (Erode) 50:13.9, 3.
INRC 3T: Naveen Puligilla/Santhosh R Thomas (both Hyderabad) 49:52.0, 1; Thejas S/ Ravindra Kumar (Both Bengaluru) 53:17.5, 2; Ramcharan C/ Vignesh Mahalingam (Both Coimbatore) 56:58.6, 3.

FORMULA ONE The Briton didn't resort to overt aggressiveness but relied on fair play to win his maiden Drivers' title

'Nice guy' Norris finishes first, finally!

SIDNEY KIRAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

Last year, under the dazzling lights of the Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi, Lando Norris made a promise to himself after ending McLaren's 26-year wait for the Constructors' title by taking the chequered flag for the fourth time in his career as well as the season. "You all deserve this. Thank you so much. It's been a special year. Next year is going to be my year too," an ecstatic Norris exclaimed on the team radio. Having finished second behind the irrepressible Max Verstappen in the Drivers' championship, it was clear the Briton was already plotting his personal ascension to the throne that was ruled with an iron fist by the Dutchman.

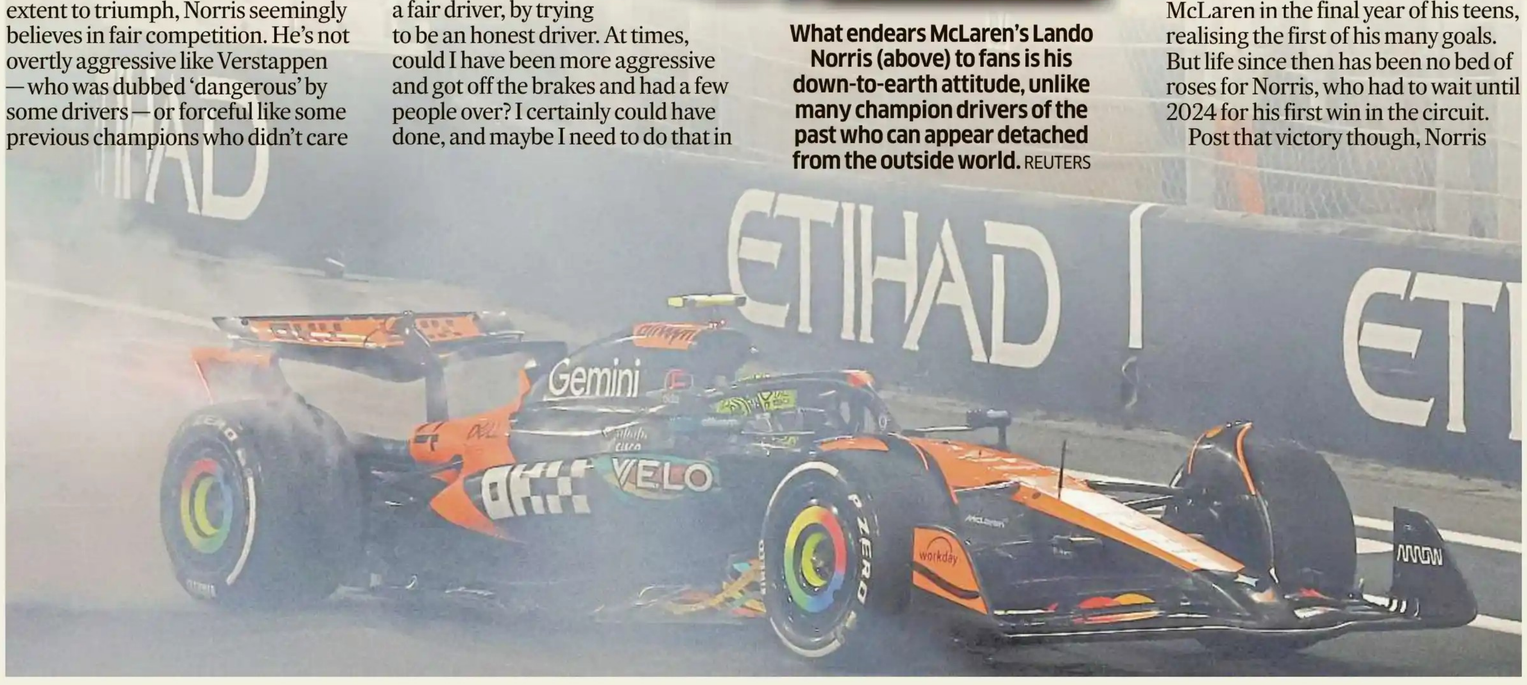
Exactly a year later, and at the very same circuit, the easy-going yet steely Norris has fulfilled his promise, capturing his maiden Drivers' title after an engrossing three-way battle with his team-mate Oscar Piastri and Red Bull's Verstappen. Leading the standings heading into the season finale, all that the 26-year-old Norris had to do was finish on the podium to realise a childhood dream. But given how the season had panned out with fortunes fluctuating between the three drivers in one of the most fascinating battles in recent memory, Norris had his work cut out despite being better placed among the three contenders.

Norris did the first part of the job beautifully, locking in the front row behind Verstappen during the qualifying on Saturday. Disaster struck on race day as Piastri overtook him in the first lap while Ferrari's Charles Leclerc exerted immense pressure by constantly clipping on his tail. The situation was extremely tense considering McLaren's late season slip-ups that allowed four-time champion Verstappen to make a comeback from nowhere. If Norris lost his third place and Verstappen won, it would be another crowning moment for the Red Bull driver. But Norris produced a composed performance, first holding off Leclerc and then steadying himself to secure a third-place finish and edge Verstappen by two points (423-421) in the ultimate battle.

Norris' rise to the pinnacle is indeed a breath of fresh air that Formula One fans had been waiting for a long time. Long used to seeing ruthless drivers like Michael Schumacher, Ayrton Senna, Alain Prost, Sebastian Vettel, Lewis Hamilton, and Verstappen rule the sport with their win-at-all-costs attitude, fans hoped to see a 'nice guy' finish first. They wanted someone relatable, like one in the stands. And the fresh-faced Norris is exactly that, one who always thrives to win it clean without venturing into the dark arts. In a sport replete with controversies where drivers and teams have gone to any extent to triumph, Norris seemingly believes in fair competition. He's not overtly aggressive like Verstappen — who was dubbed 'dangerous' by some drivers — or forceful like some previous champions who didn't care about winning it ugly. After all, sports generally remember champions, not how they've done it. In fact, even in his duel with team-mate Piastri, neither one of the them was favoured by McLaren at any stage. It was healthy competition.

"I feel like I have just managed to win it the way I wanted to win it, which was not by being someone I'm not," Norris said after his triumph. "That's one of the things that makes me most proud. Not trying to be as aggressive as Max (Verstappen) or as forceful as other champions might have been in the past, I'm happy. I just won it my way -- by being a fair driver, by trying to be an honest driver. At times, could I have been more aggressive and got off the brakes and had a few people over? I certainly could have done, and maybe I need to do that in the future, but is that me? No. Is that the way I want to go racing? Is that me? It's not."

What endears McLaren's Lando Norris (above) to fans is his down-to-earth attitude, unlike many champion drivers of the past who can appear detached from the outside world. REUTERS



Norris, in fact, has remained grounded right through his life despite being born with a silver spoon. Son of an extremely successful businessman — his father Adam was named in the 2022 Sunday Times Rich List with an estimated fortune of 200 million pounds — Norris figured racing was going to be life when he was just seven years old. He started go-karting right away in 2007 and slowly started moving up the ladder; his own skill and will and his father's deep pockets working well in tandem. After smashing several records in go-karting and other racing series, his biggest breakthrough came in 2019 when he joined McLaren in the final year of his teens, realising the first of his many goals. But life since then has been no bed of roses for Norris, who had to wait until 2024 for his first win in the circuit.

Post that victory though, Norris has upped his game in spectacular fashion. He posted three more last season and triumphed seven times this year. His victory count was one less than Verstappen's but what made him the champion was the incredible consistency he displayed all season, registering a whopping 18 podium finishes. It's almost like Norris was hellbent on making up for the disappointments for the early part of his career where despite being talented, he necessarily didn't have the livery to exhibit it.

McLaren, home to several champion drivers like Senna, Prost, Niki Lauda, Mika Hakkinen, and Hamilton, continued from where they left off last season. They gave the best of cars to both Piastri and Norris, treating both as equals. The two drivers made the utmost use of it, the latter finding the extra fire when it mattered most. Thanks to his rising success, Norris has now become one of the most recognisable faces on the circuit and a massive star in the Netflix docuseries 'Drive to Survive' that has become a rage amongst racing fans. Norris, who is dating Portuguese model and actress Margarida Corceiro, has emerged as a star off the track too, gracing columns in Vogue, Vanity Fair and GQ — generally reserved for the high profile.

Norris is quick remember all who have this fame and adulation possible. "I wouldn't be here without my parents, the sacrifice they've made, my brother, my sisters, the amount of times they text me, I don't get back to them! Everything leads into what we all achieved today. This is not my World Championship. This is ours," said a sobbing Norris, his family in the pit garage also overwhelmed with emotion.

Norris, in delivering the world title at McLaren, has joined a list of extraordinary gentlemen for "The Papaya". His journey has just started, and he'll be hoping to craft a legacy of his own in seasons to come.

Aashirya sprints to twin titles

BENGALURU, DHNS: It was double delight for Vyasa International School's Aashirya Kottary at the Star Track Athletic Club's 28th State inter-school athletic meet at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium here, winning both the 100m and 200m events in the senior girls' category.

Aashirya was crowned the 100m champion, finishing the race in 13.2 seconds and also won the 200m race with a time of 27.3 seconds.

In the senior boys' event, Yaseen Shariff won the 100m (11.5s) title.

Results: All winners: Senior
Boys: 100m: Yaseen Shariff (11.5s); 200m: Dhruv Dsouza (23.9s); 400m: Nitansh Ponnappa CR (54.9s); 1500m: Nitansh Ponnappa CR (4:43.1s); Long Jump: Isaiah Dawson (5.68m); Shot Put: S Shivshankar (10m); 4X100m relay: Delhi Public School East (48.4s).
Senior Girls: 100m: Aashirya Kottary (13.2s); 200m: Aashirya Kottary (27.3s); 400m: Saadhvi Ravikumar (1:04.5s); Long Jump: Raiyven Terceira I (4.74s); Shot Put: Devika M (8.56m); 4x100m relay: Delhi Public School, East (55s).
Boys U-19: 200m: Lakshya Punia (22.3s); 400m: Lakshya Punia (50.7s).
Girls: U-19: 200m: Athena Ami Sanjoy (25s); 400m: Athena Ami Sanjoy (1:04.3s).
Jr Boys: 100m: Neevangladwin Franklin (12.5s); 200m: Krishna Dhami (26.9 s); 400m: Nived Karthik (1:08.2s); 800m: Vidhudeep Nag (2:35.9s); Long Jump: Krishna Dhami (4.87m); Shot Put: Aarnava HC (8.47m); 4x100m relay: Bishop Cotton Boys School (57.3s).
Jr Girls: 100m: Yashashwini R (13.6s); 200m: Yashashwini R (28.1s); 400m: Akira Muthamma (1:11.4s); 800m: Kruthi Bagali (2:48.6s); Long Jump: Parnita Pradeep (4.29m); Shot Put: Deepika M (6.75m); 4X100m relay: Delhi Public School East (57.8s).

FOOTBALL PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea back on track

Ekitike scores a brace in Liverpool's 2-0 victory over Brighton

LONDON, AFP

Cole Palmer returned with a much-needed goal as Chelsea beat Everton 2-0 in the Premier League on Saturday to end a run of four games without a win in all competitions.

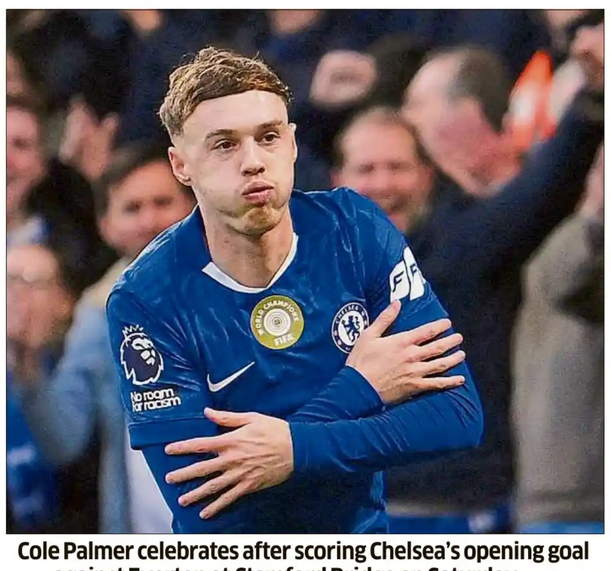
Victory at Stamford Bridge lifted Chelsea back into the top four.

Injury-plagued attacking midfielder Cole missed Chelsea's loss away to Atalanta in the Champions League on Tuesday as part of his recovery from a two-month spell on the sidelines.

Palmer was initially troubled by a groin problem and then fractured his toe after stubbing it on a door at home.

The 23-year-old made his first start for the Blues since September in last weekend's goalless draw at Bournemouth.

The England international broke the deadlock against Everton in the 21st minute at Stamford Bridge. Malo Gusto played in Palmer with a fine pass and he beat fellow England international Jordan Pickford at the goalkeeper's near post.



Cole Palmer celebrates after scoring Chelsea's opening goal against Everton at Stamford Bridge on Saturday. AFP

Everton dominated possession, with Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez saving well from Jack Grealish.

All of Everton's pressure failed to yield an equaliser and Chelsea, against the run of play, doubled their lead in first half stoppage-time when a counter-attack ended with Gusto turning in a cut-back from Pedro Neto.

Everton had a chance to make it 2-1 when Carlos Alcaraz curled in a cross to the back post only for the unmarked Grealish to divert the ball well wide.

Chelsea almost added a third when Reece James's quick free-kick was only just tipped over the bar by Pickford.

Salah sets it up

Mohamed Salah set up a goal in Liverpool's 2-0 win against Brighton on Saturday as he returned to action after an explosive outburst cast doubt over his future at the Premier League champions.

The Egypt forward, the subject of intense scrutiny in the build-up to the game at Anfield, came off the substitutes' bench to huge cheers in the 26th minute, replacing injured defender Joe Gomez.

The home team, whose title defence has collapsed after a shocking run of results, were leading 1-0 at the time, with France forward Hugo Ekitike on the scoresheet after just 46 seconds.

Brighton squandered a number of opportunities to level and Ekitike scored again with half an hour to go to give Liverpool breathing space.

Salah accused Liverpool of throwing him "under the bus" after he was left on the bench for last week's 3-3 draw at Leeds -- the third match in a row that he had been named among the replacements.

Salah was omitted from the midweek Champions League trip to Inter Milan, which Liverpool won 1-0, posting a picture on social media of himself alone in the gym.

Results: Chelsea: 2 (Palmer 21st, Malo Gusto 45th) bt Everton: 0; Liverpool: 1 (Ekitike 1st, 60th) bt Brighton: 0.

Atletico regain La Liga momentum

MADRID, AFP

Atletico Madrid returned to winning ways in La Liga with a 2-1 victory over Valencia on Saturday, sealed by a fine Antoine Griezmann strike.

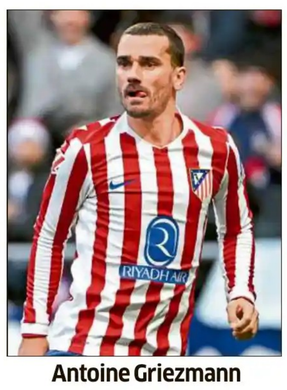
Goals by captain Koke and Griezmann brought Diego Simeone's fourth-placed side within six points of leaders Barcelona, who host Osasuna later on.

Atletico had muscled their way back into the Spanish title race after a slow start to the season, before suffering damaging consecutive Liga defeats by Barca and Athletic Bilbao at the start of December.

They followed up a Champions League victory at PSV in midweek with a solid display at their Metropolitano stadium against Los Che.

"We made a big effort in the Champions League, it was hard for us to find our rhythm, and in the end it was the substitutes who gave that spark and that speed, so that we could win today," Griezmann, brought on in the second half, told DAZN.

Valencia began well, Hugo Duro hitting the crossbar, but were undone by a scramble at a corner. Goalkeeper Julen Agirrezabala repelled one effort but was unable to do anything as Koke slid home the rebound.



Antoine Griezmann

The visitors thought they had levelled through Pepelu after 35 minutes but the goal was disallowed after a VAR review for offside against Duro in the build-up.

Target man Alexander Sorloth could have extended Atletico's lead before half-time after charging into the box but Agirrezabala denied him.

Valencia, 16th, pulled level soon after the hour, with Beltran's blast from distance catching out Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak.

Result: Atletico Madrid: 2 (Koke 17th, Griezmann 74th) bt Valencia: 1 (Beltran 63th).

Golden Kingdom wins feature

KOLKATA RESULTS

Adhirajsingh Jodha-trained Golden Kingdom and ridden by MS Deora won the BM Khaitan Memorial Calcutta Gold Cup, the feature event of the races on Saturday.

1. Madras Race Club Cup - 2000M: Great Guns (A Prakash) 1; Third Avenue (Tejeshwar) 2; Good Deeds (Vikrant) 3; Sativur (Vishal Bunde) 4; Wb: 5- 1/4, 6,7, 6L. T: 2:05.49. TB: Aashay Doctor. Fav: Sativur.
2. Hong Kong Jockey Cup -1200M: Cosmology (A Prakash) 1; Argento (Suran Narredu) 2; Echoes Of Eternity (Vinay Jaiswal) 3; Wb: 6-3/4, Dist. T: 1:13.50. TB: Pesi Shroff. Fav: Argento.
3. Police Martyrs Cup - 1100M: Zalia (A Prakash) 1; City Of Joy (Vishal Buunde) 2; Winsangel (MS Deora) 3; Happy Morning (Hasib Alam) 4; Wb: 3-1/2, 3/4, 1/2L. T: 1:06.98. TB: Aashay Doctor. Fav: Most And More.
4. Mounted Police Cup - 1200M: Light The World (Hasib Alam) 1; Into The Storm (MS Deora) 2; Cash Your Luck (Vishal Bunde) 3; True Faith (Prastanth Thapa) 4; Wb: 3-1/2, 1-1/4, 1-1/4L. T: 1:13.14. TB: Aashay Doctor. Fav: Cash Your Luck.
5. Police Commissioner's Cup - 1400M: Golden Glow (Gaurav Singh) 1; Bharat (A Prakash) 2; Aeropoli (Hindu Singh) 3; Aspira (RS Bhati) 4; Wb: 2-1/4, 2-1/4, 5L. T: 1:24.24. TB: Rajender Reddy. Fav: Divine Art.
6. BM Khaitan Memorial Calcutta Gold Cup - 1600M: Golden Kingdom (MS Deora) 1; Dubai Princess (Shezad Khan) 2; Duke Of Tuscany (Vaibhav) 3; King Louis (Vishal Bunde) 4; NR: Monteverdi. Wb: 3/4, Nk, 1-1/2L. T: 1:38.19. TB: Adhirajsingh Jodha. Fav: Trakila.
7. Ivanoe Cup - 1200M: Victoria Cross (Vishal Bunde) 1; Abhicandra (RS Bhati) 2; Dragon's Gold (Md.Sameer) 3; Fresh Hope (MS Deora) 4; Wb: 2-3/4, 2-3/4, 1-1/4L. T: 0:59.17. TB: Neil Darashah. Fav: Abhicandra.
8. Avalanche Star Cup - 1100M: Resplendence (Suraj Narredu) 1; Tres Bien (Md.Sameer) 2; Desert Charm (Vaibhav) 3; Horus The Great (Vinay Jaiswal) 4; Wb: Dist, 3/4, 2L. T: 1:05.67. TB: Rajesh Narredu. Fav: Resplendence.

Bengaluru dividends
I race: Rs 29w; 12, 22p; Fc: Rs 182; Q: Rs 65; Shp: Rs 33; Thp: Rs 25; Tri: Rs 477 & 173.
II race: Rs 18w; Fc: Rs 23; Shp: Rs 26.
III race: Rs 58w; 15, 14, 25p; Fc: Rs 566; Q: Rs 167; Shp: Rs 28; Thp: Rs 63; Tri: Rs 3,303 & 1,415; Ex: Rs 18,693 & 4,807.
IV race: Rs 63w; 16, 16, 13: Fc: Rs 360. Q: Rs 193; Shp: Rs 36; Thp: Rs 44; Tri: Rs 817 & 325;. Ex: Rs 10,968 & 4,700.
V race: Rs 62w; 14, 11, 11p; Fc: Rs 441; Q: Rs 194; Shp: Rs 44; Thp: Rs 39; Tri: Rs 1,412 & 409; Ex: Rs 12,043 & 6,882.
VI race: Rs 59w; 12, 18, 12p; Fc: Rs 499; Q: Rs 315; Shp: Rs 49; Thp: Rs 31; Tri: Rs 1,233 & 292; Ex: Rs 10,149 & 4,799.
VII race: Rs 27w; 13, 11, 44p; Fc: Rs 49; Q: Rs 23; Shp: Rs 36; Thp: Rs 84; Tri: Rs 573 & 557; Ex: Rs 2,105 & 696.
VIII race: Rs 14w; 10, 15, 16p; Fc: Rs 93; Q: Rs 92; Shp: Rs 46; Thp: Rs 43; Tri: Rs 207 & 45; Ex: Rs 1,662 & 1,809.
Jackpot: Rs 8,084 (56). **Runner-up:** Rs 2,622 (74). **I treble:** Rs 538 (39). **II treble:** Rs 9,101 (5). **III treble:** Rs 433 (422).

Fynbos for main event

MUMBAI SELECTIONS

Fynbos, from the stables of Pesi Shroff and ridden by P Trevor, is fancied to win the Indian 1000 Guineas the first classic of the races to be run over a mile at the races on Sunday. The first race starts at 2:30 pm.

1. RJ Kolah Trophy - 2000M: Evaldo 1, Charlie 2.
2. MN Nazir Trophy - 1600M: Eagle Day 1, Substantial 2.
3. Mahalakshmi Sprint Million - 1200M: Miss American Pie 1, Jade 2, Credence 3.
4. Indian 1000 Guineas - 1600M: Fynbos 1, King's Gambit 2, Kavya 3.
5. Jehangir P Dubash Trophy - 1000M: Bee Magical 1, Elusive Art 2, Goddess Of Dawn 3.
6. Korea Racing Authority Trophy - 1400M: Star Impact 21, Red Mist 2, Finch 3.
Day's best: Substantial. **Jackpot:** 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. **Treble:** 3, 4, 5.

Champion Whelan flexes his muscles against Molla

BENGALURU, DHNS: World No. 1 Jack Whelan **(in pic)** came up with a sizzling show to blow away the challenge of Mohd El Molla of Egypt 13-1 to annex the Joy Heyball International Open crown here on Saturday.

One of the consistent and technically complete players on the global stage, the British cueist hardly put a foot wrong in the final and took home $15,000 winner's purse. El Molla had to be content with a purse of $7,000.

Barring a few errors midway through the 'Race to 13' clash, Whelan was on top of his game. He had the motley crowd spellbound, and his rival in awe, with his consistent and excellent potting.

The Briton's cue ball control was immaculate and he kept his rival on a tight leash with his safety play.

Results: Final: Jack Whelan (GBR) bt Mohd El Molla (Egy) 13-1.
Semis: Whelan bt David Anderson (RSA) 11-7; El Molla bt Sundeep Gulati (Ind) 8-4.

Hooda, Isharani, George reach final

CUTTACK, PTI

Top-seeded Unnati Hooda and compatriot Isharani Baruah set up the women's singles final while second seed Kiran George set up the men's singles title showdown against Indonesia's Muhamad Yusuf in the Odisha Masters Super 100 here on Saturday.

The 18-year-old Hooda, a winner of the 2022 edition and 2023 Abu Dhabi Masters, was stretched by former Junior World No. 1 Tasnim Mir before prevailing 18-21, 21-16, 21-16 in a hard-fought semifinal that lasted an hour.

Isharani Baruah

Kiran George

After conceding the opening game, Hooda controlled the rallies better and showed superior temperament in the closing stages of the next two games to book her place in the final. In the other semifinal, Assam's Isharani produced a strong comeback to defeat Tanvi Hemanth 18-21, 21-7, 21-7.

In the men's singles, Geroge progressed to the final after beating Rounak Chouhan 21-19, 8-21, 21-18 in a clash that lasted 53 minutes.

In the mixed doubles semifinals, India's S Kanapuram and R Uthayasooriyan were shown the door after going down 16-21, 19-21 to fifth seeds Dejan Ferdinansyah and B Wardana of Indonesia.

On the other hand, Sathwik Reddy and Reshika Uthayasooryan too bowed out in the other last-four clash.

The women's doubles pair of Ashwini Bhat and Shikha Gautam too lost at the semifinal stage.

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ILLUSIONS AND DELUSIONS

Why nations win: A legacy of independent institutions

TCA Ranganathan
The former chairman of the Export Import Bank of India is a banker with a theory of everything
@tcartca

As India charts its course towards the vision of Viksit Bharat, it is worth reflecting on the enabling ecosystems that sustain developed societies. Nobel laureate James A. Robinson (Economics, 2024) has argued that nations prosper when they build inclusive political and economic institutions that distribute power broadly and foster innovation.

Illustratively, the United States demonstrates how decentralised institutions endure across generations. Federalism disperses authority, courts remain independent, regulators are credible, and local autonomy is strong. Leaders matter, but prosperity does not rest solely on their shoulders. The legitimacy of American leadership derives from institutions that outlast individuals, preventing power from concentrating in one place. The recent Trump-Mamdani meeting underscored this point: even a powerful president found it natural to invite the mayor-elect of New York City – several rungs below him in hierarchy – to discuss differences. Such engagement reflects institutional strength.

Germany's postwar trajectory offers another lesson. After the 1945 split, West Germany rebuilt inclusive institutions; its Bundesländer or federal States anchored in democracy, market competition, the rule of law, and an independent judiciary. These semi-sovereign units dispersed authority, fostered innovation, and ensured prosperity. East Germany, under Soviet influence, imposed centralised planning, suppressed dissent, and concentrated power. By the 1980s, the contrast was stark: West Germans enjoyed rising living standards and global integration, while East Germans endured stagnation and shortages.

Crucially, decentralisation in West Germany embedded accountability locally and anchored stability through institutions like the Bundesbank and the Mittelstand, ensuring resilience even amid energy shocks. Leaders mattered, but institutions absorbed transitions, safeguarding prosperity from the whims of any single successor. Following reunification in 1990, the reintroduction of federated states to the eastern section gradually helped normalise prosperity across the country. This process was uneven and took time, but it underscored how decentralisation can heal divides and anchor stability in a unified polity.

Argentina's story illustrates the opposite. At the dawn of the 20th century, Argentina was among the world's most prosperous nations. Its per capita income rivalled that of the US, and Buenos Aires was celebrated as the "Paris of the South". Yet this promise unravelled. The Great Depression exposed weaknesses, and the 1930 coup began a cycle of military interventions. Instead of building resilient checks and balances, Argentina relied on charismatic leaders. Juan Perón's rise in the 1940s brought welfare programmes and industrialisation, but also entrenched centralised control and politicised institutions. Short-term gains discouraged competition and innovation. By the 1980s, hyperinflation devastated savings, and the 2001 sovereign default shattered investor confidence. Scholars call this the "Argentine paradox": a nation that began the century rich but ended it unstable and underdeveloped.

Pakistan in the 1960s was hailed as a model of development. Under Ayub Khan, the economy grew rapidly, buoyed by the Green Revolution and foreign aid. Yet power was concentrated in the executive, parliament was weak, and bureaucracy politicised. Wealth clustered among a few industrial families, while East Pakistan lagged. The 1965 war strained resources, unrest mounted, and in 1971, East Pakistan broke away to form Bangladesh. Bhutto's nationalisation discouraged investment, and growth slowed. What appeared to be impressive progress proved fragile because institutions were neither decentralised nor independent. Without strong checks and balances, the system faltered under pressure, and decline followed.

China's transformation after 1978 shows how institutional choices, combined with decentralisation, can succeed in a different context. Deng Xiaoping dismantled rigid planning and introduced reforms. The household responsibility system gave farmers property-like rights to land use. Special economic zones, such as Shenzhen, attracted significant foreign investment. Decentralisation allowed local officials to experiment with market policies. Over time, adaptability was embedded into governance, fiscal institutions, and banking. Provinces and municipalities competed for investment and growth, unlocking productivity and propelling China's rise.

The lessons are clear. Argentina, East Germany, and Pakistan show how prosperity built on centralised power unravels once its limits are reached. By contrast, the US, West Germany, and China demonstrate how prosperity rooted in decentralisation and strong institutions endures across generations. Without independent courts, credible regulators, and local autonomy, growth relies solely on individuals – and when they falter, gains are lost. Where institutions are created and protected, prosperity becomes broad-based and lasting.

Viewed from this perspective, India's model uniquely combines political decentralisation with centralised economic management and limited executive accountability. This created stability but restricted growth in the early decades until liberalisation in the 1990s unleashed strong GDP expansion. Yet we now face a paradox: prosperous urban islands coexist uneasily with rural distress. Alongside, mass migration fuels disorganised urbanisation, increasingly burdened by chronic pollution and strained infrastructure. The challenge is not merely administrative but, perhaps, institutional design. A course correction may thus be needed – one that strengthens decentralisation and effectiveness, embeds accountability, thus ensuring that prosperity is not confined to enclaves but shared across society.

ROVING REFLECTIONS

A song to outsing the noise

The unseemly controversy and polarising debates over *Vande Mataram* took my mind towards my school days in Gorur. That Kannada-medium government school in rural Hassan had walls with photographs of national heroes – from Gandhi to Bose to Nehru to Ambedkar. As I remembered the rendition of *Jana Gana Mana* as part of the Independence Day celebrations at the school, it struck me that while the imagery of that ritual and the cadence of the anthem have lingered, we never understood the Bengali lyric. Yet it had an indescribable effect on us. It brought in a sense of oneness which blurred the religious and other divisions of that singing group. In my mind, I revisited the beat and lilt of Vanshidhar Shukla's *Kadam kadam badhaye ja*, Henry Francis Lyte's *Abide with me*, and Muhammad Iqbal's *Saare jahan se achcha*; I also replayed the marching song of the Indian Armed Forces, a true ode to the diversity of this great nation.

I was oblivious to the meaning, history, or significance of the songs in the armed forces for many decades after I first heard them as a 13-year-old, while marching in the Republic Day Parade in Delhi in 1965. The impressive parade involving defence personnel, cadets from across the country, and tableaux that showcased the cultures of different states and their ethnicities left an indelible impression. As far as I can recall, in those days, we were not invested in interpreting these songs to the minutest detail or questioning the authenticity of the political messaging in their lines.

Vande Mataram has been accorded the status of the 'national song', but it is not a regular fixture at ceremonial events. Every rendition of the song – even in its instrumental version – continues to leave an electrifying effect on me. I must, however, admit that I understood only the first two words – *Vande Mataram*.

There have been unsavoury controversies over the National Anthem, too. While some objected to the mention of the province of Sindh, others have protested the exclusion of Kashmir and the Northeastern states. My state, Karnataka, has seen controversies over its state anthem, *Jaya Bharata Jananiya Tanujate*, penned by the legendary Jnanpith laureate Kuvempu. Adopted in 2003, the anthem celebrates Bharata as the mother of Karnataka and emphasises the diversity, unity, and rich cultural heritage of the land. It has been at the centre of controversy over its length, its "officially accepted" tune, and the non-inclusion of prominent figures.

Capt G R Gopinath (Retd.)
builds bridges, sometimes by tearing down walls. He is a soldier, farmer, and entrepreneur

Such debates and tensions are not restricted to India. In the United States, the country's national anthem has been objected to by blacks over its racist overtones. There is context in the fact that the author of the song, Francis Scott Key, was a slaveholder. The United Kingdom has witnessed objections over the "outdated" homage its anthem pays to the monarchy. Closer home, the Bangladeshi national anthem, *Amar sonar Bangla*, also written by Rabindranath Tagore, has faced Islamist backlash. Proposals to adopt an alternative anthem have been made, even during the term of the present Muhammad Yunus-led interim government.

When South Africa gained independence from a brutal regime, the great statesman Nelson Mandela faced a similar challenge. The national anthem of the apartheid era had brazen connotations of white supremacy. Mandela, as the first post-apartheid president, showed great sagacity and gifted the new nation an anthem that incorporated both black and white cultural heritages, in keeping with his vision of reconciliation and unity.

The ongoing debate in India, of course, has a striking political context. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charge that Nehru "shortened" the national song to appease Muslim sentiments and the BJP's attack on the Congress over its "communal" and "divisive" agenda come ahead of a crucial election year. This political battle has been playing out in a familiar pattern, on the familiar pitch of tweaked/distorted history.

If the BJP and the RSS stand for *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* and the Congress represents the spirit of secularism, where is the difference, really? What is the point of contention here? The warring camps must show maturity by looking beyond the immediate electoral takeaways and focus, instead, on building a stronger nation. This is not the time for our political leadership to stand divided. This is the time to ensure that political face-offs do not distract us from the larger national goals, at a time of intense geopolitical power shifts and an evolving world order that is marked by dissonance and uncertainty. The song presents an opportunity to introspect, shun acrimony, and re-embrace our glorious diversities.

SANS THE SACRED

Campaign *dharma* and the reluctant warrior

If you have been following the Munnar panchayat elections, or not, you might have done a double-take at the name of the candidate the BJP is fielding – Sonia Gandhi. And if you only heard of it now, don't worry, this is not a bizarre high-level defection. The candidate's father just happened to be a huge Congress supporter, while she married a BJP supporter and happened to join his party. Goes to remind us – we might think ideological differences are irreconcilable, but real lives are messy, and roles shift all the time. Why, even Krishna, who was so firmly on the Pandavas' side in the Kurukshetra war, gave his entire army away to Duryodhana.

Whoever wins the panchayat election, based on their name, party symbol, or something else, the real challenge with the government is in actually effecting change. Since we are already on the Kurukshetra war, I was thinking of how difficult it was to actually get Arjuna to fight. Krishna, god himself, gave him an eighteen-chapter exposition on a variety of matters to get him to quit feeling sorry for his relatives and fight the war. First, he told Arjuna that the soul is eternal, and the body is subject to death anyway. So what does killing someone in battle really mean? And then, he told Arjuna how to perform actions such that the resultant sins don't attach to them.

He even revealed his *vishvarupa*, the cosmic form, which showed Kaurava warriors, including Bhishma and Drona, gnashed between the teeth of Krishna, who stood as Death personified. Krishna essentially told Arjuna that his opponents were all dead already, killed by Krishna, and Arjuna only had to be the instrument. After all this, Arjuna conceded that his doubts were resolved and he would fight the war.

Anusha S Rao
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@AnushaSRao2

Then Yudhishtira, with his brothers, went to Bhishma and the others and asked for their blessing. And they blessed him with victory, even as they recognised that entailed their deaths. And then the war began. Bhishma, the grandfatherly figure, transformed into the formidable warrior who wreaked havoc upon the Pandava army. The twang of his bow was terrifying, and Pandava soldiers were fleeing at the sight of him. Krishna told Arjuna the time had come to make good on his promise of ending all his opponents. Arjuna agreed. Arjuna broke Bhishma's bow twice in a spurt of enthusiasm, and Bhishma was impressed. The grandfather in him emerged again, and he congratulated Arjuna – "I expected no less of you, my child. Well done!" Perhaps that made all of Arjuna's sorrows rise again, and he began to fight feebly, resisting injuring Bhishma.

Bhishma had no qualms about attacking Pandava soldiers, or even Arjuna and Krishna themselves. At this point, Krishna finally lost his patience with Arjuna. Without even addressing him, Krishna said aloud to another warrior, "I shall kill Bhishma and end the war myself today. I will win the war for Yudhishtira single-handedly." Krishna leapt off Arjuna's chariot, carried a large chariot wheel and marched towards Bhishma, who welcomed death.

Arjuna, filled with guilt at attacking Bhishma, was now filled with more guilt at the prospect of causing Krishna to break his vow of not fighting in the war; he clasped Krishna's feet and begged him to desist, promising to fulfil his earlier promises in earnest. Krishna finally relented, and we know the rest of the story of how Bhishma fell in battle.

Just imagine, if it took god so many tries to get one very powerful warrior to actually fulfil his war campaign promises – what will it take for us to get campaign promises fulfilled once officials get elected?

THIS AND THAT

Who stole radio's magic?

I don't know if you still listen to conventional radio – Akashvani, Vividh Bharati, and the BBC. The valve radio and later the transistor radio, both of which enjoyed pride of place in our drawing rooms, have disappeared from modern-day homes. The radio is now mostly heard on the car stereo. Cab drivers are among the biggest patrons of the medium today.

A lot is said about the romance of the radio though, and it is often the subject of fond nostalgia. Who robbed conventional radio of its allure? Television, for one. The visual medium, first in black and white and then in colour, was able to lure audiences away from radio listening. Television serials took away the avid readership print magazines had cultivated for serialised fiction, and that is another story. As TV technology and programming got better, it became an all-consuming medium. Today, it can afford to feature the biggest stars from cinema – they are regularly hired to host reality shows. When a majority of folks began to go home and switch on the TV for their daily dose of entertainment and news, the radio was pushed into silence. All that changed again. Now, almost all the watching is being done on mobile phones.

The advent of private FM stations in the first decade of the millennium was expected to revive the good old days of radio. The new channels did generate excitement in the initial years. The presentation moved away from the measured tone of the state-run channels. The RJs became more chatty, and it looked like they had a hand firmly on the pulse of younger listeners, but the limitations of private FM programming didn't take long to surface.

All India Radio, with its well-equipped studios and knowledgeable staff, regularly produced music, radio plays and talk shows. The programmes brought together the best talent around. The Bengaluru station of AIR, for instance, had a reputation for high-quality music. It recorded not just Karnatik, Hindustani, and Western classical music, but also *sugama sangeeta* and folk music, providing a platform for hundreds of composers, singers and instrumentalists.

S R Ramakrishna
often sees high art in kitsch and vice versa

The commercial FM channels, on the other hand, largely play film and pop music, which they license from the audio labels; they record no original music of their own. FM licences are auctioned to the highest bidders, and so the altruistic philosophy of public broadcasting doesn't come into the picture. In traditional radio, programming executives worked like journalists, but commercial FM recast them in a marketing role. That is the reason the hyper-cheerful RJ talk is marked more by brand mentions than informed commentary.

They say the typical range of an FM channel is 64 to 160 km, and the signal clarity depends on the terrain and distance from the tower. The initial promise of FM serving local needs, not just of the listeners but also of the artists, poets, writers, doctors and scientists, has faded away. We occasionally hear of community radio stations run by academic institutions – they have a long way to go before they can capture a non-academic audience.

Of course, radio is not just about music. Literature, theatre, art, cinema, politics, health, food, and fashion are among the many things that enrich the life of a city, and with the right presenters, they can make for lively subjects on radio.

Bengaluru boasts 14 radio channels. But can you name a single musician discovered, nurtured, and promoted by a commercial FM channel? Singers end up with no route to fame other than films. Not every talent gets into film music. And with no radio support, independent music is the worst hit. Some of Prasar Bharati's policies date back to the pre-Internet era, when AIR was the only auditioning, recording, and broadcasting authority. A lot needs to change to make the airwaves exciting again.

The Chinese are catering to the nostalgia of radio lovers, making sets whose designs hark back to the second half of the 20th century, when brands like Murphy, Telerad, Philips, and Bush ruled the Indian market. I just got myself one, in a sentimental attempt to experience the glory days of radio again. Not much to write home about when it comes to what I heard, so let me end with two mobile app recommendations for radio lovers. One is called Radio Garden. It plays music from stations across the world. And the second is Jazz Radio, which streams jazz in nicely curated categories.

KNOWN UNKNOWNS

In praise of a little dirt: The cleanliness paradox

Gopichand Katragadda
The former CTO of Tata Group and founder of AI company Myelin Foundry is driven to peel off known facts to discover unknown layers
@Gkatragadda

As the Tata Group CTO, I had the opportunity to work with Yale researchers on the gut microbiome, its influence on human health, and the role of prebiotics in shaping that delicate ecosystem. One research insight mentioned during those discussions has stayed with me. Microbiome-free baby mice (delivered by C-section and raised in sterile environments) show noticeably less stress when separated from their mothers. At first glance, that seems beneficial. Yet these same mice also exhibit muted emotional responses overall. Their world is quieter, but also curiously flattened. Without microbes, their physiology and behaviour shift in ways that are both measurable and profound.

Science was making a simple point: the microbiome matters, not just for digestion or immunity, but for how an organism experiences life itself. Over the past century, however, our relationship with microbes has narrowed to a single storyline: one where microbes are enemies to be eliminated. Clean water, sanitation, antibiotics, and vaccination transformed human health. Yet, in parallel, we have seen a rise in allergies, asthma, eczema, food intolerances, and autoimmune conditions. The contradiction is difficult to ignore. The cleaner we became, the more our immune systems seemed to struggle. This contradiction is now recognised globally as the *cleanliness paradox*: we removed the harmful microbes, but we also removed the good ones.

Birth, milk, and the critical hours: The earliest moments of life are also the most biologically instructive. A baby's first major immune lesson begins not in the nursery but in the birth canal. During vaginal birth, the infant is coated with maternal microbes that seed the gut and start training the immune system. When birth occurs via caesarean section (which is often medically necessary), this microbial inheritance is bypassed. Large population studies around the world show that children born through C-section face a higher likelihood of developing asthma and allergies.

Breast milk continues this biological exchange. It is not simply nutrition but a carefully evolved communication system containing bacteria, complex sugars, and immune molecules. These sugars, known as human milk oligosaccharides, are not meant for the baby alone. They are intended to feed specific gut bacteria, which in turn guide the development of regulatory immune cells. Formula milk, despite many advances, cannot reproduce this living, dynamic ecosystem.

And then comes the wider world. The first three hours, days, and weeks matter enormously. Early microbial exposures, from skin, air, soil, and human contact, help the immune system understand what is harmless and what is harmful. Shielding infants too aggressively from microbial life does not protect them; it deprives them of teachers.

When clean becomes too clean: Modern urban lifestyles have pushed us into an era of extreme hygiene. Antibacterial soaps, surface sanitisers, routine antibiotic use, air-conditioned indoor childhoods, and limited contact with soil and animals have collectively reduced the microbial diversity surrounding children.

The result is visible. Peanut allergies, once rare in many parts of the world, have risen sharply. Grass and pollen allergies have become more intense. Food allergies in some countries have doubled in just a decade. Asthma diagnoses correlate strongly with early antibiotic exposure, especially repeated courses in the first year of life. Genes cannot explain this rapid shift. Microbial deprivation can.

A tale of two Bengaluru childhoods: Within Bengaluru, for example, the contrast between semi-urban communities and gated communities offers a microcosm of the *cleanliness paradox*.

In semi-urban communities, children still run barefoot on dusty fields, play with street dogs, climb trees, and return home wearing the day's adventures on their skin. Their microbial exposures are rich, random, and evolutionarily familiar. This is truer in rural settings. However, the downside is the increased exposure to pathogens and groundwater contaminants, leading to acute and chronic health issues.

In gated communities, life is immaculate. Playgrounds are clean. Lawns are manicured. At home, surfaces are typically disinfected. Children spend more time indoors, and when they venture out, the environment is controlled and predictable. Ironically, in these cleaner environments, pollen and food allergies are more common. This is despite better nutrition, healthcare, and infrastructure. Their immune systems are not optimal.

The difference is not economic. It is microbial.

A sensible approach to dirt: This is not an argument for abandoning hygiene. Clean water, sanitation, and vaccines remain among humanity's most outstanding achievements. The issue is not cleanliness but the loss of microbial diversity. A balanced approach allows for safe, meaningful microbial exposure.

A life scrubbed free of microbes may look orderly, but biologically, it is unbalanced. The immune system thrives on diversity, not deprivation. As counterintuitive as it seems, the road to better health for future generations may lie not in more disinfectants but in more contact with the living world. Sometimes, the simplest wisdom is also the oldest: a little dirt is good for you.

As December rolls in, gratitude often feels more like a passing trend than a genuine emotion. Its ability to heal sits uncomfortably alongside its toxic misuse and increasing commodification, leaving most of us confused about what being thankful truly means, writes Juliana Lazarus

The weight of thanks

Ancient philosophers Cicero and Seneca had strong views on gratitude. Cicero called being grateful the mother of all virtues, and Seneca ranked ingrates below thieves, rapists and adulterers. But how grateful are we really?

Sure, the world right now is not the best we've seen it. There's Gaza, where an uneasy truce has been brought about while the war drags on in Ukraine, not to mention the numerous conflicts and protests, from Yemen to Nepal to Leh to Paris and beyond. Close on the heels of wildfires, there are devastating floods and super typhoons. An already-tottering post-Covid economy hasn't been helped by the mercurial US President Donald Trump's tariffs, strictures on visas, and whatnot. Add to that AI swallowing up jobs faster than you can say perquisites ... What's there to be grateful for?

Well, how about looking at the little things that we so often take for granted? The gift of memory, for instance. To be able to have the pleasure of looking back and remembering one's yesterdays. Or even the ability to drink water when you're thirsty. Just ask Mahesh K (*name changed*), design head at a media agency. When he was in his 20s and 30s, he was known to drink like a fish. But all that changed when his creatinine level rocketed, damaging his kidney and necessitating dialysis twice a week. Mahesh could then only drink 750 ml of water a day.

"There would be people in the office who would keep getting up every half hour to drink water. Seeing them would make me so thirsty," says Mahesh. He found ways to cheat the brain — gargling, swirling an ice cube in his mouth and spitting it out, sucking on a tiny piece of lime to induce salivation .... Who would have thought that the 'fish' would one day be craving water?

So, when he had a kidney transplant recently, the overriding emotion was one of gratitude. "I bowed in my heart to the entire team that had kept me alive through four long years on dialysis and during the surgery. It's a debt I can never repay. And then, there was this unknown, unseen human god who made this possible. Someone lost their life, and through their gift, I gained mine back," says Mahesh.

According to Dr Sampurna Chakraborty, Clinical Psychologist and Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology, Amity University, Noida, studies show that practising gratitude — whether through journaling, expressing appreciation, or simply reflecting on what we're thankful for — activates brain regions linked to reward, empathy, and moral cognition, especially the medial prefrontal cortex.

"On a physiological level, gratitude is associated with the release of dopamine and serotonin, two neurotransmitters central to feelings of well-being. It also helps reduce cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone, which in turn can lower blood pressure, improve sleep, and support immune function. In many ways, gratitude operates like a natural antidepressant that helps in both emotional uplift and biological resilience," she adds.

And as Cicero so rightly said, gratitude spawns a whole lot of other positive feelings — kindness, empathy, generosity, humility, and the desire to give back, to name just a few.

Mahesh says: "This second chance at life is not just a miracle; it is a responsibility. I told myself that I must live better than before, with more purpose, more kindness. I want to do everything I can to spread awareness about organ donation. Too often, in the name of tradition or ritual, we cremate or bury bodies — yet those very organs have the power to save nearly eight precious lives. What greater act of humanity can there be than to give someone a second chance to live?"

Weaponised gratitude

While gratitude, in the truest sense of the term, can lead to that warm glow within, sometimes, it doesn't feel like gratitude; it feels more like resentment. For instance, when someone uses gratitude as a weapon to extract compliance.

Arya S has been through this. It was 2022 when she had just gone through a break-up. Around the same time, she started her first job. The organisation, though small, was a prestigious one doing some impactful work.

"However, I was not able to come out of that mindspace. And work was voluminous. And my boss — a charismatic, corporate guru — would pick on me. However, overnight things changed when he developed an attraction for me. He started going easy on me, and this became obvious to others, too, and they also became close to me," she says.

It was flattering at first. "I was so grateful to this guy because he helped me come out of the negative space I was stuck in. I felt he changed my life."

That sense of gratitude translated into packed 12-hour work days, seven days a week. "My parents were worried about me. I tried to put in my papers, but the response was always, 'Oh! How can you leave me and go?' It was emotional blackmail. Plus, there were anger issues ('That's because I feel so comfortable with you').

"I was in a bad space, he pulled me out of it, but was again pulling me back into a worse space. I started feeling used. It was like unpaid labour on the pretext of liking me. I can't feel grateful to people to the extent that I'm suffering," says Arya.

She left after eight attempts at resignation. And it took her many more months to come out of it.

Say thanks, don't burn out

"I did not know toxic gratitude was even a concept till I went through it and read up about it," says Arya.

So, what is toxic gratitude? According to Dr Sampurna, toxic gratitude occurs when we pressure ourselves — or others — to feel thankful or stay positive in situations that are genuinely painful, unjust, or traumatic. It can invalidate real emotions and discourage people from processing difficult experiences that may delay the process of healing and recovery.

Melissa Crook, the author of Embracing Layers Unapologetically, refers to it as the voice that whispers, "You should be grateful," when there's a concern.

It's the friend who tells you to be grateful you have a job when you are in the throes of a burnout. Or when you are complaining about Bengaluru's now world-famous potholes, someone comes along and says, "Don't you think it's way better than what it's like in Gaza, which lies under 53.5 million tonnes of debris, approximately 10 times the weight of the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt?"

There are not enough words to commiserate with the people of Gaza, but that doesn't mean one has to be grateful for Bengaluru's roads. Such gratitude leads to emotional harm because people are suppressing their feelings, leading to a cycle of resentment, guilt, and emotional burnout. (*see box*).

Gratitude as a performance?

When there's a good idea going around, can marketers be far behind? From gratitude jars on Instagram to tracking apps that ping us to say thanks, "gratitude" has gone from a personal feeling to a public performance and a very lucrative market.

A quick look at some Instagram accounts and apps peddling gratitude shows that they come with a price — a subscription to fully access an app, or gratitude merchandise. And the reminders to be grateful — from therapists, influencers, podcasts, reels, jars, journals — can turn a little exhausting. If we are forced to be grateful, won't thankfulness turn into a chore?

Schenelle M, a student, has been there. "While gratitude journaling did help me for the first two days, it started becoming very exhausting by the third. On days when I just wanted to rant or vent, it was very difficult to come up with things to be grateful for, and it made it seem as though I was performing when I did write it down (which beats the whole purpose of journaling). So, I stopped."

Maybe there's a middle ground between chore and toxicity. As Dr Sampurna puts it, "Ultimately, gratitude isn't about ignoring what's wrong — it's about noticing what's still right, even in hard times. That makes it a quiet, but powerful tool for resilience."

How to stay grateful

Derrick Carpenter writes about the science behind gratitude on happify.com. Here are three tips from him on staying grateful:

1 **Be specific:** If you're going to be saying I'm grateful to my family and friends every single day, chances are you're just mouthing words. Say what exactly you are grateful for – grateful to my sister for picking up the kids from school, grateful to a colleague for offering to work on his day off so that I could keep my appointment with the dentist.

2 **Make it fun:** Keep a gratitude jar, for instance. Empty the jar and read it once every now and then. Or stick notes around the house so that you are reminded to practise gratitude.

3 **Be social:** While gratitude is largely an internal thing, there's no reason why you should let it stay inside of you. Write letters, thank you notes. Let your gratitude spill over.

Listing the benefits

Dr Sampurna cites several studies that prove the benefits of gratitude. An early and notable study is from the University of California, Berkeley, which found that people who kept a gratitude journal for just three weeks reported increased optimism and well-being that lasted for months after the intervention ended.

A functional magnetic resonance imaging study found that participants who wrote gratitude letters showed greater neural sensitivity in the medial prefrontal cortex up to three months later, suggesting long-lasting changes in the brain.

"So while the 'feel-good' hormone release might be short-term, the psychological and neurological benefits of consistent gratitude practice can persist much longer," says Dr Sampurna.

Toxic gratitude: Stay away!

Mindful gratitude is about authenticity, not obligation, says Dr Sampurna as she offers some tips to not be caught in the vortex of toxic positivity:

1 Honour the full spectrum of emotions. Gratitude should never come at the cost of suppressing grief, anger, or sadness.

2 Practice "both/and" thinking. You can be grateful and struggling. For example: "I'm grateful for my support system, and I'm also overwhelmed right now."

3 Never force gratitude on others, especially in moments of loss or hardship. It's more helpful to hold space than to offer silver linings.

It's always worth pausing to reflect: Who are the people who silently support our lives? And what can we do to acknowledge their presence?

How everyday generosity can turn lives around

We often come across myriad heartwarming tales of "privileged" people helping those who play a role in their daily lives — loyal and long-standing employees, drivers, domestic helps, guards, cleaners and others. These stories, spread across geographies and cultures, are invariably united by a common thread: respect, empathy and a shared sense of dignity.

For example, an Indian MNC recently announced significant equity-based rewards to its employees, including factory and shop-floor workers. According to reports, this marks the first instance in the country where a Deepavali bonus was awarded in the form of equities, rather than cash. The value of this grant was estimated to be Rs 500 crore and covered more than 14,000 employees.

A few years ago, Indian diamond merchant Savji Dholakia drew global spotlight when he gave 600 cars and 400 apartments as gifts to his employees, coinciding with the 2018 Deepavali. Gujarat-based Dholakia, known for his flamboyant yet generous rewards, said at the time that many of these workers had stood by him for decades, and he considered them his family.

In 2021, a woman from Texas made headlines when she donated a house to the woman who had raised her, her childhood nanny. The video of her handing over the house deed went viral, touching hearts around the world. "She loved me when she didn't have to," the woman said, describing her former nanny as her "second mother".

In another example of life-changing generosity reported in the UAE, a Filipino employer in Dubai paid for his housekeeper's children's education back home in the Philippines. This story, shared on expat forums in 2020, stood out not because of the amount of money involved, but because of its long-term impact — helping a family secure their future through education.

However, not all acts of kindness make headlines. While working with a newspaper based in Abu Dhabi, I witnessed a host of instances where my colleagues have shown exemplary benevolence to their lesser-privileged support staff — gestures that have had a life-changing impact on the beneficiaries' lives that no camera ever captured.

One such colleague was April Robinson, then deputy art director. Known for her warm nature, she also carried a quieter quality — generosity without fanfare. She often supported underpaid office attendants and housekeeping staff, but one story stands out.

When April bought her dream car, a silver Jaguar, many wondered what she might do with her old Volkswagen. When I asked her about it, half-hoping to buy it myself, she told me it was already spoken for. But when I gently pressed, she said she had given it to her longtime house cleaner, a "soft-spoken" Filipina who had worked in her home for years.

"She once told me she was studying to get her driver's licence," April recalls. "I considered selling the Volkswagen — but God placed it on my heart to bless her with it instead. She had been a steady presence in my life — this was just returning the blessing in another form."

Making a difference, without fanfare

For April, it was a simple gesture. But for her house cleaner, it changed everything: no more long rides, but more freedom and more opportunities. Today, she is married and settled in Canada and living a life once beyond her reach. Proof that kindness creates ripples far beyond what we imagine.

Another instance of generosity that stands out is that of a senior editor who donated a brand-new laptop to a housekeeping staff member who typically worked night shifts. Mubarak Yusif, the Ghanaian worker, had endeared himself to everyone in the newsroom with his knowledge of a wide range of subjects — from sports to politics.

His never-say-die attitude and unwavering drive to improve his circumstances eventually caught the attention of the editor, resulting in this life-changing donation.

Yusif is now a well-known figure in boxing circles. Today, as a sports promoter, he rubs shoulders with the sport's elite at marquee events across the world.

"I'm the best matchmaker in Ghana right now," he insists — classic boxer-style bravado — but not before expressing heartfelt gratitude to the benevolent editor: "Yes, he bought a new laptop for me. I've got his picture on it [as my screensaver]. I will pay him a surprise visit one day."

Of course, everyone cannot aspire to be a Dholakia, but by cultivating a greater sense of empathy and mindfulness, each of us can make a difference in the lives of people who may not be receiving five-digit pay cheques at the end of the month.

As we navigate our own journeys, it's worth pausing to reflect: Who are the people who silently support our lives? And what can we do to acknowledge their presence — not just in moments of need, but in moments of celebration and gratitude?

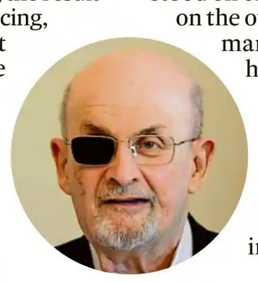
After all, the best gestures aren't about changing lives overnight. They're about saying, "I see you. I value you. Thank you."

Thufail Muhammad
The writer is a journalist, editor and translator based in Abu Dhabi.

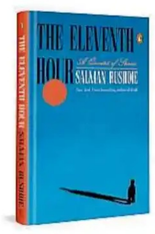
Inspired perhaps by his own brush with near-death, Rushdie presents a collection of stories that look the Grim Reaper in the eye, but they fall short of expectations, writes Nandita Bose

Behind the veil

The shadow of death stalks all, leaves none untouched. It is primal, almost involuntary, like a scream, and gasping for breath when smothered. In the hands of an alchemist, it reaches a state of immortality, a purer form of gold. When the maestro Salman Rushdie ponders death in The Eleventh Hour: A Quintet of Stories, the result is difficult to describe: tear-inducing, inward-looking and profound. It isn't easy to look death in the eye unflinching, with tenderness and trepidation, agony and ache. Perhaps Rushdie's own flirtation with it in the guise of a madman's attack with a knife, then the slow recuperation offered him ample time to rehearse, research and simmer.



Salman Rushdie.
(PIC COURTESY: AFP)



THE ELEVENTH HOUR
Salman Rushdie
Penguin, pp 254, Rs 899

"That is better than looking, as you do, like a man who is still waiting to live." Fittingly set in Chennai, 'South' features two men in their sunset era, known only as Senior and Junior V. With a rare economy of words, the author creates resonances which present a hologram of their reality: squabbles, a dwindling outer set of friends, and inevitably awaiting death. "... the two old men struggled to their feet and lurched out onto their adjacent verandas, emerging at the same moment, like characters in an ancient tale, trapped in faithful coincidences, unable to escape the consequences of chance."

The juxtaposition of a private tragedy with the tsunami's after effects in Chennai tells of the public devastation set against a death by accident, of an entire fishermen's village being swept away, of a city in shock and grief, of a populace changed forever by the present's devastation. "Death and life were just adjacent verandas. Senior stood on one of them as he always had, and on the other, continuing the tradition of many years, was junior, his shadow, his namesake, arguing."

Chandni Contractor is 'The Musician of Kahani', prodigiously talented. Blessed with a Steinway, she travels the world for her concerts and makes the mistake of falling in love with Majnoo Ferdaus, whose family is super-rich and blind to culture in any form. "Love lands where it lands and doesn't ask for explanations. Explanations come from the world of rationality, and love is unreasonable." The vast differences between the families lie at the heart of the story; that art is magic in its own right, and people who do not believe must be or deserve to be destroyed, figuratively or not. In this story, a thinly-veiled Osho-like figure meets his downfall as he clashes with Chandni's music. This is a bombastic Bombay phillum-style fantasy that frankly quite loses the plot.

As a full scholarship student from India, Rosa is quite cowed down by the dynamics of her university with its Japanese, African, Thai and Jamaican students, the learning on display and the rigour. She unexpectedly finds an unusual friend; mournful, maybe morose. "When the honorary fellow SM Arthur woke up in his darken college bedroom, he was dead, but at first that didn't seem to change anything. All was familiar: his curved-back "boat bed", the cough drops and the assortment of morning medications, all in their place on the bedside table beside a small black notebook, the "dream diary" in which he wrote down the sentences that sometimes came into his sleeping mind instead of images."

This is the ghost of Simon Merlyn Arthur, Indophile and a man who tried but could not make it as an author. And she is entrusted with the task of sorting out the notes he left behind. As she sorts through his unfinished writing, she finds dozens of unfinished works, some of promise. "An apocalyptic vision (that is, a fragment of one) in which Eden appeared at the end of time, rather than the beginning: The Garden at the End of the World. Adam and Eve stood naked in the garden and watched the death of the universe." Rosa eventually serves as a translator, a bridge between the living and the dead, for an important conversation Merlyn must have with Lord Emmemm, which leads to the lord's confession on TV that homophobia drove him to chemically tweak the mind of a genius and cause him to be trapped in mediocrity.

The final story is of an old man who waits for language to show up at the piazza, an author's truest friend and mortal enemy. Three of the stories seem to have been destined to be full novels, stop at novella length and then are reframed as long short stories; perhaps a glitch in the publishing process. Entertaining as these stories are, they seem incomplete, almost abrupt, like death itself. Death here is not a grisly event but a transformation of a soul's well-lived journey. The stories, despite their wandering, are a slow-burn of a kind that makes the reader long for respite while yearning for one more chance at life.

Death in these stories is not a grisly event but a transformation of a soul's well-lived journey.
(PIC FOR REPRESENTATION)

A true-to-form police procedural

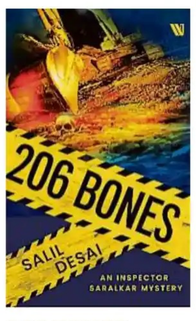
This latest in the Saralkar series offers not just the thrill of a howdunit but also gives the reader insights into the nature of crime itself, says Savitha Karthik

A young architect takes up a building redevelopment project, and just as he starts work, out comes a skeleton, not a metaphorical one, but very real (206 bones and all). Thus begins a police procedural that keeps you hooked till the last page. 206 Bones is the sixth and latest in the Inspector Saralkar series by crime fiction writer Salil Desai.

If you love crime fiction and police procedurals in particular, you are by now familiar with the syntax. Body found; Inspector and his PSI arrive at the scene; the forensics procedure follows; red herrings pop up; a valiant attempt to adhere to the "no leaks to media" diktat — the format gives the reader a sense of order and control, and you are in a state of flow. Salil Desai has employed all the devices that make this genre what it is.

True to form, Senior Inspector Saralkar has a strong work ethic but can also be moody and cynical, a bit like Ian Rankin's John Rebus. He has given up drinking, although he seems to have flirted with rum again in the latest novel. Saralkar brings sardonic wit to the table; he bickers with his wife, Jyoti, and occasionally makes cutting remarks and snaps at his PSI, Motkar.

The PSI knows Saralkar too well and has some smart comebacks — only he doesn't say them aloud. If you have read any of the earlier Saralkar books, you know by now that Motkar is the perfect foil to Saralkar's brusque and sometimes boorish approach. Motkar goes by the book, and his work is guided by conventions. Saralkar is not your likeable Senior Inspector; you find yourself empathising with Motkar. It is the combination of Saralkar and Motkar, the flawed and human cops, that seems to work for the series. The police officer who is most impressive with her meticulousness and quiet efficiency in the latest case is the Gen-Z ASI Sanika Zirpe, who unearths some clues to the murder that leaves PSI Motkar feeling slightly envious, and uncharacteristically so.



206 BONES
Salil Desai
Westland, pp 360, Rs 499

The city as a character

Set in and around Pune, the city's social, economic and cultural landscapes play a key role in the Saralkar series, and characters come from different backgrounds. In Killing Ashish Karve (the first book in the series), the author explores family dynamics in a well-to-do household. In 206 Bones, too, the story of a wealthy family is unravelled. The characters are drawn from a cross section of society — wealthy deceased parents with considerable clout, their children settled away from the parental home with families of their own, and a line-up of domestic workers, from gardeners to drivers. The bungalow is Shanti Villa, where, of course, Shanti (peace of mind) is conspicuous by its absence. As Saralkar and his team try to put the pieces of the puzzle together, they are confronted with other events that may or may not be linked to the original mystery.

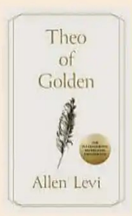
The author ensures that the curiosity element is intact throughout, without overwhelming the reader with too much detail — oftentimes, writers fall for the temptation to pack in all their research — in this case, research shows, but in the characterisation and settings, and not as standalone elements.

A little more 'show, don't tell,' and we'd have a crisper narrative. For instance, when one of the key characters doesn't show up for police questioning, we hear of it in at least two different situations — the repetition feels a tad jarring.

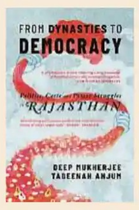
Having said that, this latest Saralkar procedural offers not just the thrill of figuring out a whodunit or a howdunit, if you must, but also gives you insights into the working of the police force and the nature of crime itself. Like in the earlier books in the series, here too, there is some amount of philosophising by Saralkar, Motkar and Zirpe — giving us a peek into how police work can make them feel. The procedural also makes you think of how the individual engages with society, with all its constructs of class and hierarchy.

Written simply, the latest in the series makes for easy reading. Salil Desai, it seems, is on to something with the Punekar duo of Saralkar and Motkar.

BOOKRACK



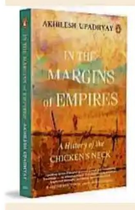
THEO OF GOLDEN
Allen Levi
HarperCollins, pp 386, Rs 499
This is a beautifully crafted novel about the power of creative generosity, the importance of wonder to a purposeful life, and the invisible threads of kindness that bind us to one another.



FROM DYNASTIES TO DEMOCRACY
Deep Mukherjee and Tabeenah Anjum
Macmillan, pp NA, Rs 599
Rajasthan, India's largest state, is often imagined as a land of sweeping deserts, majestic forts and colourful traditions. Yet, beneath this picturesque surface lies a complex reality. This account fills a crucial gap in our understanding.

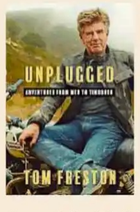
EXIT STRATEGY
Lee Child and Andrew Child
Penguin, pp 346, Rs 699
Jack Reacher will make three stops today. Not all of them were planned for. First, a Baltimore coffee shop. Second, a store to buy a coat.Third, wherever this bend in the road takes him...

IN THE MARGINS OF EMPIRES
Akhilesh Upadhyay



Vintage, pp 328, Rs 499
As India and China play a cat-and-mouse game, smaller states and communities in the borderlands, including the Chicken's Neck, find themselves caught up in the larger geopolitical arena. This is the story of the region.

UNPLUGGED
Tom Freston



S&S, pp 320, Rs 799
This is a freewheeling and riveting memoir from media honcho Tom Freston that takes us behind the scenes of his global adventures — from hitchhiking around the world to cofounding MTV.

Blueprints of dread

Uketsu, the masked storytelling phenomenon, challenges readers to decipher sinister floor plans and urges them to stumble into a house teeming with secrets, writes Siddharth Mohanty

Strange Houses has much to pique your curiosity and lure you into its "murder rooms", even before you have turned the first page. Uketsu, its author, is apparently a phenomenon in Japan. All three of his horror mystery novels are national bestsellers, including Strange Houses, whose translation by Jim Rion has been released in the English-speaking world this year. Uketsu is also known for his viral, eponymous YouTube channel with 1.87 million subscribers. There, using illustrations, architectural floor plans, and images as clues, he presents scary suspense stories and puzzles in phantom mode, speaking through a voice distorter and wearing a black stocking over his hair, a black turtleneck, black gloves, and a crude papier mâché mask. He makes public appearances too in the same costume, remaining entirely anonymous.

Uketsu.
(PIC COURTESY: UKETSU)

Uketsu's earlier novel, Strange Pictures, was also a bestseller.

The Strange House is a Japanese manga version of the novel.
(PIC COURTESY: WIKIMEDIA)

If this is not bait enough, Strange Houses quite clearly has an uncharacteristic structure. Just a cursory flipping of its pages reveals dozens of floor plans and hand-drawn diagrams alongside the text, seemingly as a sort of invitation for the reader to join in, analyse the information, and solve the mystery with the narrator.

STRANGE HOUSES
Uketsu
Penguin, pp 208, Rs 599

The mystery is introduced at the outset, directly, with no build-up. An unnamed freelance writer who specialises in "stories of the macabre" is approached by an acquaintance to look into the floor plan of a fairly new house in a quiet residential area of Tokyo. The acquaintance is keen to buy the house, which looks bright, spacious, and almost perfect. But it has one strange and eerie element — a dead space, or a tiny room with no doors, concealed between two kitchen walls.

Flummoxed, the writer shares the floor plans with his friend Kurihara, an architect, and together, they discover other unsettling details about the house — a windowless child's room at the centre of a larger master bedroom, a windowless bathroom, and a narrow enclosure adjoining the rear wall of the garage. The writer and the architect discuss all the probable reasons for this unusual layout and finally come to a bizarre but frighteningly logical conclusion — the incongruities make sense only if the house is built for murder.

Both become fixated on the idea that the dead space in the kitchen could be a secret passage from the child's room to the bathroom. In the past, a child kept hidden from prying neighbours in the windowless child's room could have entered the bathroom through the passage, even if the bathroom was locked from inside, to murder a particular person or persons taking a bath. And, perhaps the garage enclosure would have stored the bodies for as long as it took to dispose of them safely. Could this hypothesis be true? If true, who could use a child to murder people? The two friends plunge deeper into the mystery when, suddenly, a chopped-up body is found near the house, and a young woman reaches out to the writer about the existence of a second strange house.

The tagline on the cover describes the book as a "Japanese mystery sensation", which is a nod to an early kind of thrillers that were popular in 1860s Britain. Sensation novels were quintessentially suspenseful stories with complicated plots involving crime, dark secrets, and conspiracies. Unlike the classic detective story, they did not have a central detective figure. Uketsu stays true to this genre of immersive storytelling. Despite the setting being 2019 Japan, this crime mystery is devoid of any actual, modern-day investigative work. There are no cops, forensics, or even suspects. Instead, it is a writer and an architect using floor plans, conversations, a letter, and a bunch of hypotheses to unravel a mystery involving occult, deep-rooted family rivalries, and sinister deaths.

Despite its freshness, Strange Houses carries some imprints of the Japanese crime fiction culture. For instance, the windowless bathroom in the Tokyo house is an element of the typical room mystery, a recurring theme in modern Japanese crime novel writing. The theme involves the discovery of a murder victim in a room locked from the inside, a seemingly improbable situation (think Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd). A key component of room mysteries is that they provide floor plans and all other clues to the reader to solve the mystery (referred to as Fair Play).

Strange Houses is a little over 180 pages, and at least a third of these carry floor plans and diagrams. So, understandably, its writing is stark and unembellished. But there are twists aplenty in the narrative to keep you captive in the murder rooms. Don't ignore the Afterword!

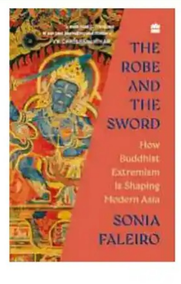
READ OF THE WEEK

We think of Buddhism as a faith of peace — rooted in compassion, patience, and nonviolence. But across South and Southeast Asia today, the robe is being turned into a weapon, as radical monks and nationalist movements unleash hatred and war.

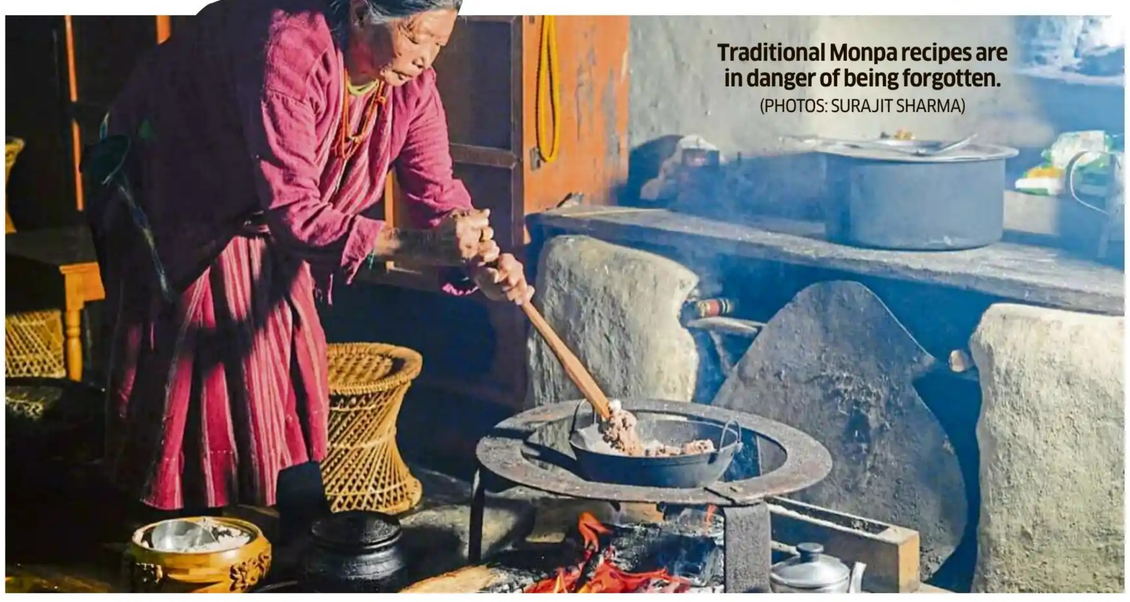
In The Robe And The Sword, acclaimed journalist Sonia Faleiro travels from Sri Lanka's riot-scarred towns to the homes of refugees along the Myanmar border to Thailand's fortified temples, uncovering how militant monks have transformed a tradition of nonviolence into a tool of terror. Through vivid portraits of zealots, survivors and dissident monks fighting to reclaim their faith, Faleiro delivers an unflinching investigation into the colonial trauma, economic grievances and political forces fuelling a dangerous new extremism.

The Robe and the Sword is a searing and indispensable work of narrative nonfiction, urgently needed to understand how sacred traditions are being weaponised — and what is at stake for the future of our interconnected world.

Sonia Faleiro is the author of two acclaimed works of non-fiction. Her reporting and essays have appeared in *The New York Times, Financial Times*, *Harper's*, *Granta* and *The Times Literary Supplement*.



One woman's experiments with native ingredients like millets is sparking a quiet culinary revival in Arunachal Pradesh's Monpa community, writes Barasha Das



Traditional Monpa recipes are in danger of being forgotten. (PHOTOS: SURAJIT SHARMA)

A MOMO REVOLUTION

When 41-year-old Rinchin Jomba's recipe for momo, a type of steamed dumpling, won the Millet Recipe Contest organised by the agriculture centre Krishi Vigyan Kendra in 2023, her joy transcended the thrill of winning an award. She had spotlighted the culinary heritage of her community, the Monpas. The contest was part of the International Year of Millets 2023 celebrations, in Arunachal Pradesh's Chug Valley, nestled in the West Kameng district.

Rinchin Jomba has popularised Monpa food.

Jomba created her momo recipe using kongpu (finger millet) for the wrap and stuffing it with boiled locally-sourced potatoes and onion greens. Her goal was to reintroduce the indigenous kongpu, once very popular, to appeal to the changed palate of the younger generation.

In just a year, her millet momo has become a hit, among the local residents and tourists.

The Monpas have lived in the Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh for a long time. In Tibetan/Bhoti literature, 'Mon' generally refers to regions at a lower altitude compared to the Tibetan plateau and 'pa' refers to people. Monpa refers to the community living in the south of Tibet on the Himalayan slope.

For a tourist visiting the popular West Kameng and Tawang circuit, the momo (dumplings) and thukpa (a type of noodle soup) have become synonymous with Monpa food. Ironically, these dishes, now made with refined flour, are modern adaptations. Dumplings were part of the festive delicacies, where the wraps were crafted from bong (barley), and filled with vegetables, herbs, pork, and yak meat. Thukpa is more than noodles. A regular household variant, it is a roasted maize soup, with dried radish, local kidney beans, dried yak meat with a subtle touch of jabrang (Sichuan peppercorns), and seasoned lightly with salt.

Millet momos are a healthy spin on the regular steamed dumplings.

Monpa food traditions

The Monpa community traditionally cultivated millet, barley, buckwheat and maize crops. The Brokpa, a sub-group of the community, specialises in rearing yaks, crucial to their cuisine and livelihood. Monpas have a rich knowledge repository of alcoholic beverages, dried and fermented foods, foraged herbs, berries, mushrooms, and meat from domesticated and wild animals.

While the tribe traditionally consumes meat, some sections consume only the meat of dead bovines like yak. Yak milk products, such as chhurpi, churkam, ghee and curd, have a significant presence in their daily diet.

The older generation reminisce that rice was unknown to most people three to four decades ago, with only certain varieties being cultivated in the valleys of West Kameng.

When wheat took over

In the mid-1960s, the Indian Army began establishing permanent military bases in Arunachal Pradesh. "The Army provided food, medicines, and other essentials," Jomba says, adding, "Our father used to bring home atta (wheat flour) from the barracks — it was darker in colour, and it was from the Army that we first learned to make roti."

Tsering Drema, a horticulturist from Dirang town in West Kameng, says that until then, they had never seen vegetables such as cauliflower, cabbage, or even tomatoes. "For example, the Japanese persimmon was introduced by the horticulture department in the late 1980s. Before its arrival, a wild variety with much smaller fruit was native to the region. Today, the new variety is propagated through grafting onto the native species, and persimmon harvests have boomed."

In the 1980s, fair-price shops supplied rice, wheat, sugar, and kerosene extensively. The abundance of food led villagers to abandon the cultivation of labour-intensive crops and vegetables, impacting traditional food practices.

Pema Wange, a native of Thembang Heritage Village and Senior Project Officer at World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) India, says the lack of proper education and medical facilities drove villagers to "migrate to urban settlements, leaving behind their traditional agrarian lifestyle."

Rediscovering lost flavours

Jomba and seven other women operate a diner called Damu's Heritage Dine in Chug Valley. Damu means 'daughter' in the local Duhumbi language. With support from WWF-India, the eatery has revived forgotten native ingredients and recipes. A seven to eight-course meal is prepared using homegrown and hand-picked forest produce in a traditional kitchen.

It begins with phursing gombu, a corn tart with the oleoresins of the Chinese lacquer tree, gently roasted in yak ghee over charcoal. The corn tart is followed by takto khazi puttang — buckwheat noodles with local herbs and fermented soybean and chilli sauce. The noodles are handmade in an indigenous wooden noodle maker called puttang shing.

Other dishes include the gunchung (buckwheat) thukpa, millet tacos (a contemporary recipe with native fillings), khurba (buckwheat pancake) with litho (wild pear) marmalade, fin brumsha chura kamtang (pumpkin and glass noodle stew), shya marku (chicken ginger and ghee stew), korsha (kidney bean stew) and dressi (local red rice fried in yak ghee with crushed walnuts and jaggery).

The dishes are served with a variety of chamin (chutney). "Monpa cuisine has a lot of chutneys made from seasonal berries and herbs," adds Jomba.

Nishant Sinha, coordinator for community-based tourism with WWF-India, who led this initiative, explains that they aim to provide the local community with an alternative source of livelihood as an incentive to conserve their forests and natural resources.

Retrieving the lost recipes was a struggle. "The elders taught us a few, and since then, we've been rediscovering them one-by-one," says Jomba. The next challenge was sourcing buckwheat, finger millet, and other native grains. The eatery is now encouraging the local community to resume growing them in the valley.

(TWF)

WHAT'S COOKING

Bang for the buck

If you are looking for a gluten-free ingredient for traditional recipes, buckwheat may just be the answer. Called a pseudo cereal or grain, buckwheat is actually a seed. It's fibre-rich, and a good low-glycemic index (GI) ingredient. Touted as a superfood, it is also known for its high mineral and antioxidant attributes.

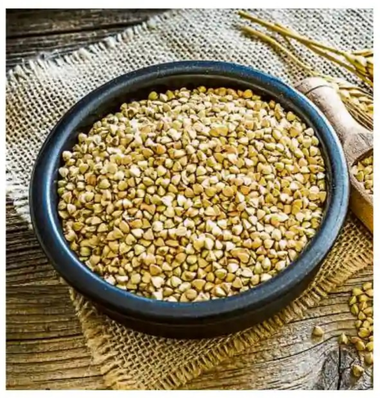
Buckwheat is used in flour and grain forms. Buckwheat flour can be used for rotis and parathas (called kuttu ka paratha in Hindi). If you are bored of the same old rotis, use the flour with some spices and seasonings to make a batter, and try out cheela (usually made with besan) or dosae. Alternatively, you could use a slightly thicker batter to make steamed dhoklas. The grain is also used to make a light and fluffy khichdi, with a mix of vegetables and moong dal.

The flour can also be used for waffles and pancakes. You could use the grains in the same manner as you would use oats and make a hot cereal or a porridge, and top the bowl with fruits or nuts.

Buckwheat noodles are also popular, and you can make a Korean version of buckwheat noodles and top it with a spicy gochujang sauce for some flavour.

The versatile ingredient is available as flour, cereal and noodles on most e-commerce platforms and supermarkets, and is not difficult to source.

*(**What's Cooking** shines the spotlight on a single ingredient, its nutritional qualities and the ways in which you can use it.)*



Weathering the storm

Drawing from their experiences around helping their loved ones with schizophrenia, Dr Kavita Arora and Neha Kirpal share strategies to support someone diagnosed with the condition

"Being a lifelong carer to a parent with schizophrenia and having lost a younger sibling to suicide, my own lived experiences have deeply influenced my passion for making quality mental health help accessible to families with long-term suffering and acute distress. My mother has had a 20-year undiagnosed, untreated illness which took four-five years of management with oral and injectable medication, consulting multiple doctors and several hospital admissions; before finding a stable treatment plan with lasting outcomes.

"My mother has had five-six relapses in the last decade, but they are now understood, identified and promptly treated. Through this time, she is able to laugh with her granddaughter, share family meals, and feel a daily peace that once felt unreachable." - Neha Kirpal, a carer, healthcare entrepreneur and mental health ambassador.

"I believe that my personal lived experience contributes significantly now to my professional care approach. I continue striving to design services that identify the current care gaps. It is essential to treat the illness with competence and a combination of interventions that can include medications, working on treatment adherence, education about the illness, family support, caregiver involvement and inpatient treatment for some over the long term course of the illness." - Dr Kavita Arora, who grew up with a mother diagnosed with schizophrenia and opted to become a psychiatrist, besides being a carer to her mother.

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Here are some strategies to help a loved one diagnosed with schizophrenia:

Recognising the signs

It's important to understand the illness, initiate treatment and not define the person as the illness. Schizophrenia often develops gradually. Sometimes, in the acute stage episodes, the behaviour can include violent outbursts, conspiracy theories and unfounded suspicion about someone they had trusted earlier. What may be confusing for the onlooker because of its natural course, is that often in parallel to the above symptoms, the personality is well preserved in certain areas and the individual may appear quite able and coherent in some of their daily contexts. Knowing the signs helps families seek support early:

Positive symptoms: added experiences that seem out of the ordinary to the person's usual self: hallucinations, (hearing voices or seeing things others don't and responding to them as if they are real), delusions (fixed false beliefs that do not seem to have an understandable reason), and disorganised speech or changes in behaviour from the usual self.

Negative symptoms: loss of previously present function — withdrawal into self, or from the social circle, reduced emotions, with the range becoming narrower than is usual for the person, lack of motivation and seeming pre-occupation, neglect of self-care, hygiene and social norms.

Other symptoms include difficulty concentrating, remembering or following conversations. Decreased or erratic sleep-wake rhythm, significant changes in appetite or weight are also some signs.

If you notice these signs in someone you love, start by gently encouraging professional help at the earliest.

Treatment and managing the illness

Schizophrenia is a lifelong condition, but it doesn't have to be a life without meaning, connection, or recovery. The right treatment and support systems can help you rewrite the story.

Seeking timely help to prevent further progression of the illness is key. Love and care, while powerful, are not substitutes for professional care and clinical/medical intervention for the illness.

The right kind of medication, therapy and family support can transform lives, but resistance and mistrust are common. Identifying personal goals rather than "clinical outcomes" of disease or illness may be more helpful to engage in personalised collaborative care rather than ending up with involuntary treatment, which may be the only option for a subset of people who develop schizophrenia.

A delicate balance

Caring for someone with schizophrenia means walking a delicate balance: offering support without losing yourself. When we can say, "this is the illness speaking, not my family member," we help to protect ourselves from disappointment and resentment, and preserve long-term relationships.

(The writers are Founding Cohort - India Mental Health Alliance (IMHA). Their experiences are part of the book, 'Homecoming: Mental Health Journeys of Resilience, Healing and Wholeness', co-authored by Neha Kirpal and Dr Nandini Murali, published by Westland Books.)

Care for the caregiver

- Learn about the course of the illness over time. Understanding possible triggers and symptoms demystifies behaviours that might otherwise feel personal or hurtful.
- Set compassionate boundaries. It's okay to step back when interactions become overwhelming. You are not abandoning your loved one – you are preserving your ability to stay supportive in the long run.
- Seek your own support tribe or groups. Talking to others who have walked a similar path helps you process complex emotions, find validation and solutions while ensuring you don't feel alone.
- Build a life beyond caregiving. Your joy is not betrayal; find ways to bring lightness, meaning and purpose into your own life as a carer.
- Accept that guilt will visit – but don't let it stay. It's a visitor, not a verdict.
- Ensure you protect the most vulnerable in the family; children who are unable to process and navigate life in a dysfunctional home environment must be supported.

MYTHBUSTER

Eight glasses of water a day?

How often have you been told to get eight glasses of water a day without fail? In fact, this recommendation, along with 10,000 steps a day, usually ranks high on most people's list of fitness and health goals.

But has this scientifically been proven or is it a myth? While studies show that it is important to keep yourself hydrated, stay healthy, lose weight, improve digestion and also slow down ageing, there are no conclusive studies that stipulate a specific amount of water. According to a 2022 study published in the journal, 'Science', one requires anywhere between 1.5 and 1.8 litres of water a day, and not necessarily eight glasses, the equivalent of two litres.

Guidelines that specify eight glasses of water fail to account for the water content in certain foods. Also, there is no one-size-fits-all formula for drinking water. When you are low on fluids, the thirst alert kicks in, so just pay heed to it and get some water.

There is also a belief that the more water you consume, the more efficiently the toxins in your body are flushed out by your kidneys but science says that as long as your water intake is adequate, your kidneys do a good job of removing toxins. A 2018 study published in the medical journal, 'JAMA', reported that over 600 patients with chronic kidney disease were given more water than those who drank under two litres but that did not in any way change the kidney function in the former group. So, just drink water when you need, and don't obsess over numbers.

*(**Mythbuster** picks up a popular wellness belief and examines if it is true, false, or maybe lies somewhere in between.)*

Pallabi Dey Purkayastha chalks out the ideal weekend itinerary for Meghalaya's capital, Shillong, which includes its mist-kissed peaks, waterfalls and soulful cafés

48 HOURS IN: SHILLONG

Meghalaya's charming capital is an abode of clouds.

The hills are calling

Shillong is every dreamer's paradise — small yet stunning, cosy yet captivating. Blink, and you might miss the pine cones and thick blankets of cherry blossoms that cover its streets each year. Here's how to experience Shillong in just 48 hours — and fall under its spell.

Day 1

Start at Shillong Peak (Laitkor Peak)

If you love catching panoramic views, begin your journey at Shillong Peak. At 1,965 metres above sea level, it offers sweeping vistas of the surrounding hills and dense forests. The peak is located within an Indian Air Force base, so photography is prohibited. Carry a valid government-issued ID, which is checked at the entrance.
Entry fee: Rs 50 for Indian nationals. Foreign nationals are not permitted for security reasons.
Additional cost: Rs 200 for a private car to cross defence land (available at the entrance).

Head to Elephant Falls

Just eight kilometres from Shillong Peak, this three-tiered cascade is one of the region's most picturesque waterfalls. Hire a cab and negotiate a combined fare with the Baa (a local term of respect for men) to cover both Shillong Peak and Elephant Falls, as they are located close to each other.
Entry fee: Rs 100 for adults and children.

Time for Ward's Lake

Also known as William's Lake, this waterbody was created in 1864 by Sir William Ward, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam. Decades on, it remains a beloved hangout for locals and tourists alike. Take a leisurely stroll, watch the sun dip over the rippling water, rent a paddleboat, or simply sit on the lawns and watch swans drift by.
Entry fee: Rs 20 for adults, Rs 10 for children.

Include a visit to Elephant Falls in your itinerary. (PHOTOS BY AUTHOR)

A poster of Bob Dylan at the popular cafe named after him.

Don't miss this church

Built on the site of Meghalaya's first church, the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians (Dhankheti Church) is a fusion of faith and modern design. Its indigo-hued walls, stained-glass windows, and elegant chandeliers make it uplifting.
Entry is free.

Lunch at Dylan's Café or Shillong Café

Shillong's café culture is legendary. Dylan's Café, dedicated to Bob Dylan, exudes an easy-going vibe with great food and music, while Shillong Café serves hearty bowls of thukpa and the city's special chowmein — perfect for a cosy lunch between adventures.

Shop and snack

At the heart of Shillong lies Police Bazaar — a bustling hub for both shopping and snacking. Pick up bamboo clutches, tote bags, and pine-cone crafts from local emporiums, or simply wander around sampling the city's delicious street fare — momos, chaat, fish fry, and kebabs galore.

Dinner at City Hut Dhaba

No trip to Shillong is complete without a meal at City Hut Dhaba. Popular with both locals and tourists, it's the perfect way to wrap up your first day in the city.

Day 2

Visit Laitlum Canyons

About an hour from the city, the Laitlum Canyons are nature's masterpiece — rolling green hills merging into endless horizons. Start early to catch the sunrise over the canyons.

Visit the Golf Course

At 5,200 feet above sea level, Shillong's golf course is among the most scenic in the world. With manicured greens bordered by towering pines, it's ideal for long, contemplative walks or a serene break in nature.
Entry fee: Free (open till sunset).

Lunch at a local 'Kong's' eatery

To truly experience Shillong's culture, eat where the locals eat. Try one of the Kong's (a respectful term for women) eateries in Laitumkhrah or Police Bazaar. Non-vegetarians must try Jadoh (rice cooked with smoked meat) and Dohkhlieh (a pork and onion salad). Vegetarians can opt for simple North Indian or Assamese thalis available across local cafés.

Explore the Museum

Stop at the Don Bosco Museum, which showcases the art, history, and heritage of Meghalaya's Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes. The museum also shows how the region's missionary past shaped its culture.
Entry fee: Rs 100 for Indians, Rs 200 for foreign nationals.

A walk in the park!

Fancy watching ducks glide across ponds or pelicans feed in a lush green oasis? Lady Hydari Park is your spot. It's peaceful, and dotted with flowers — ideal for unwinding.
Entry fee: Rs 20 for adults, Rs 10 for children.

Chinese for dinner

Shillong's Chinese food scene is far from the Indo-Chinese fusion you'll find elsewhere — authentic, and flavourful. Whether it's Kung Pao Chicken or Mapo Tofu, you'll find some of the best Asian food in India.

Aizawl's quiet magic

ASRA MAVAD

The winding roads and colourful rooftops are quintessentially Aizawl. PHOTO BY AUTHOR

There's something quietly magical about watching Aizawl rise before you — a city sprawled across the rolling hills like a mosaic of beautifully colourful houses and winding roads. As the plane dips through the clouds, the lush green folds of Mizoram appear, and you realise you've entered a different India — one that hums with serenity, where the rhythm of life is slow, measured, and deeply respectful of the land it stands on.

Crisp mountain air

For someone entering the North East for the first time, Aizawl feels like an awakening. The air is cool and clean, scented with rain-soaked earth and pine. The hills are alive with gentle movement. Children walking to school, shopkeepers arranging fresh produce, and elders dressed impeccably for Sunday morning mass.

Life here seems to unfold with grace. Even the traffic, which in most Indian cities is a cacophony, moves in an astonishingly disciplined flow. Cars stop for pedestrians. People wait their turn patiently. There's no honking, no chaos. It feels almost surreal — as if the city collectively decided that kindness and order are more powerful than speed. While waiting for hours in Bengaluru's traffic, surrounded by angry drivers hurling curses, it feels like a curse at the end of the workday. However, the same wait time in Mizoram is eerily peaceful, accompanied by gorgeous orange, pink, and purple sunsets.

The people of Aizawl are some of the warmest you will ever meet. Their hospitality isn't loud or exaggerated; it's genuine and heartfelt. A simple smile, a polite nod, a soft-spoken 'Ka lawm e' (thank you) — these gestures carry the weight of sincerity. You're struck by how deeply rooted the sense of community is. Churches dot every corner, not as symbols of dominance, but as places where people gather to sing, talk, and support one another. Sundays are sacred — the entire city slows down to rest, worship, and reconnect. In a world that never stops, Aizawl reminds you that stillness is also a form of beauty.

The city itself is a fascinating blend of tradition and modernity. Bamboo houses cling to steep hillsides beside cafés serving a mix of Korean foods and local delicacies, such as Chow Satui Leih and Bawngsa Chek.

From Aizawl Peak, the view is breathtaking — a sea of lights against the dark green valleys, each twinkle representing a home, a life, a story. A camera could never do justice to the beauty that lies before it. I'm told the people of Mizoram aren't fond of elaborate meals — no lavishly set dinner tables or spice-laden foods.

While the Mizo might not show great interest in their food, there's one aspect of daily life where they do not compromise. Fashion, this remains loud and clear the moment you enter Aizawl. The city is dotted with boutiques and thrift stores on every corner. While the everyday outfits are simple but chic, the Sunday outfits, especially curated for Church, will leave you in awe.

Development dilemma

Yet, as the initial awe settles, a subtle guilt creeps in. You can't help but notice the cracks — the uneven roads, the limited infrastructure, the absence of industries that fuel the mainland. There's a simplicity that feels both beautiful and heartbreaking. The North East, rich in culture and natural beauty, has long been left behind in India's grand narrative of development. You wonder why the land that gives so much remains neglected, why its people must work twice as hard to be seen and heard.

Aizawl makes you question what development truly means. Here, people live with less but seem to possess more — more warmth, more patience, more respect for one another. As you prepare to leave, you realise that this city, perched on its green hills, teaches you that progress without compassion is no progress at all.

ADVERTORIAL

Advertorial

Choose the Europe That Fits You

Neil Patil
Founder, COO & CTO
Veena World
neil@veenaworld.com

...Europe at Veena World is an entire universe of choices. We offer one hundred and twenty different group tour options. This alone shows there is no single Europe for everyone...

Every October, one question begins across all Veena World sales offices: "When are you launching Europe for next summer?" By then, many companies have released their itineraries and travellers start comparing, budgeting and imagining what their Europe journey should look like. For many, Europe is not just a holiday but a long-awaited dream. Some have saved for years, planning every moment in their minds. Others want to go once and do it perfectly, without missing anything or choosing the wrong pace. Many return repeatedly, exploring different regions or experiencing familiar places in new ways. Nobody wants to compromise with something so meaningful. Europe is too big and too personal.

That is why October becomes the month of questions and the month when we begin guiding travellers towards the Europe that suits them.

When Europe season begins, I remind our team not to get pulled into comparisons. Only travellers can compare. Our responsibility is to clearly explain what Veena World offers, our itineraries, inclusions, routing, experiences and the reassurance of tour manager support. Then we allow travellers time to think. Europe is a major emotional and financial decision and clarity builds trust more than pressure. Trust also begins by understanding what the traveller really wants. Every guest has a different pace and expectation. Some know exactly which countries they want; others only know they want Europe. A conversation about their interests and comfort usually reveals the right direction. Once we understand the mindset, the right tour becomes clear.

The Two Big Traveller Types (and the New Third)

Traditionally, travellers belonged to two categories. The first group prefers the comfort of a structured group tour where everything is planned and every day has a clear flow. The second prefers a customised holiday with flexibility and personal pacing. Now a strong third preference is emerging. Many travellers say they want a customised holiday but also want a tour manager with them. This new demand exists because our tour managers have earned deep trust. Travellers have seen how smooth Europe becomes when an expert manages logistics, anticipates challenges and adds meaningful touches. As a result, travel today includes group tours, customised holidays and customised holidays with a tour manager.

The Scale of Europe at Veena World

Europe at Veena World is an entire universe of choices. We offer 120 different group tour options. This alone shows there is no single Europe for everyone. Honeymooners, seniors, families, women travellers and repeat visitors all need something different. So our job is to simplify. The first question we ask is whether this is their first Europe trip. First timers usually want a broad, classic route while repeat travellers prefer something slower or more focused.

Europe Is Not One Place

Europe contains many distinct regions, each with its own style. That is why our tours are region based. Northern Europe has around twenty tour types whether a classic Scandinavian route, a Northern Lights journey from October to March or the Midnight Sun in June and July. Southern Europe and the Mediterranean add twenty three tours with warm coastlines and relaxed rhythms. Eastern Europe, the Baltics and the Balkans offer fourteen journeys that feel refreshingly different. For first time travellers, Western Europe becomes the natural starting point with thirty-five tour options ranging from quick highlights to deeper itineraries.

Women's Special and Seniors Special

Travel style matters too. Women's Special Europe tours offer comfort, ease and the confidence of travelling with an aligned group. Seniors Special tours offer the full Europe experience at a more thoughtful pace with sightseeing planned for half or three fourths of the day and the rest reserved for rest. Both tour types ensure travellers do not miss anything. They simply experience Europe in a way that feels suitable for them.

The How Much Europe Decision

Travellers often say they want to see everything, but that means different things. Some enjoy a fast, panoramic Europe covering several countries quickly. Others prefer depth and immersion. This is why we offer eight day tours covering eight countries, eight days for two countries or eight days dedicated to one country. Once travellers understand their preferred pace, selecting the right itinerary becomes easier.

A Simple Tool That Makes Choosing Easier

While our website contains full details, the Veena World Travel Planner is extremely helpful. Seeing all tours at a glance allows families to compare confidently and brings clarity to the decision making process.

We Listen Then We Build

Travellers frequently requested a group tour with more time in Switzerland. This year we introduced two fifteen day tours named European Charm and European Essence. Both include Switzerland and Paris. One adds Italy and Austria. The other includes Amsterdam, Bruges, Brussels, Luxembourg and Germany. This is how we evolve, shaping our itineraries based on what travellers genuinely want. With over one hundred Europe tour managers offering Mumbai to Mumbai support, guests enjoy a seamless experience throughout.

When to Go Europe by Season

After choosing the right tour, the next question is when to visit. Europe transforms with the seasons. For cool weather, March to April and September to November are ideal. For mild temperatures, May and June work beautifully. For those who avoid cold, July and August are best. Winter Europe, especially Switzerland from December to February, offers snow covered landscapes, fewer crowds and a quiet, peaceful experience if dressed warmly.

What Is Running Now and What Is Special This Year

Even today, several Europe tours are running including regular routes and Northern Lights tours across Scandinavia and Iceland. Northern Lights season is October to March. Midnight Sun season is June and July. For travellers who have visited London but not Scotland, Ireland or Wales, we offer focused ten days and fifteen days' options. This year we have also introduced a combined itinerary covering England, Scotland, Ireland and Iceland which brings two remarkable regions together.

Decide Book and Leave the Rest to Us

Europe has many versions and we are ready with all of them, the Europe you want at the pace you want in the style you want. Once you decide and book, we begin your visa process immediately. With a visa team of one hundred ten members and more than one hundred expert tour managers, your journey stays smooth and secure from Mumbai to Mumbai. So now it is time. Chalo, Bag Bharo, Nikal Pado to Europe with Veena World!

Vietnam

Until April, all Veena World sales offices will remain open on **Sundays** as well.

From Hanoi to Ha Long... Wow!
Sapa hills, Ha Long cruise, lantern Hoi An nights.

Highlights of Vietnam (5D) Feb 10, Mar 17 - 103000
Vietnam Sapa Phu Quoc (7D) Jan 11, Feb 22 - 125000
Best of Vietnam (8D) Jan 29 , Feb 14, 21 - 144000
Vietnam Cambodia (11D) Jan 3, 9, Feb 12 - 206000
Vietnam Laos (13D) Feb 1 - 260000
All of Vietnam (13D) Mar 17 - 225000

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Cloud hills, cultures, and quiet wonders.

Best of Shillong - 5 Days - Feb 9 - 60000
Kohima Majuli Ziro - 7 Days - Feb 15 - 75000
Assam Meghalaya - 7 Days - Feb 1 , 22 - 80000
Mizoram Tripura Kolkata - 9 Days - Feb 20 - 95000
Assam Arunachal Meghalaya - 12 Days
Jan 8, 20, Feb 14 - 100000 - 105000
North East Explorer - 21 Days - Feb 16, Mar 9 - 159000

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EYE ON DESIGN

Building a toy universe

Inspired by Channapatna's colourful wooden toys, a quirky project reimagines furniture in a playful new language, complete with stories of its own, writes Sowmya Putran

As Indian toy making fades into the background, a series of quirky furniture reimagines it in a playful new language. At the centre of this exploration is Huzefa Rangwala, cofounder of Mumbai-based studio MuseLAB and its newer craft-led extension, MuseMART. The idea began in Channapatna, known for its colourful hand-crafted wooden toys, its lacquer work and its signature turned-wood forms that sparked the designers' imagination.

The project supported the craftsmen and focused on making gender neutral toys that children could stack and rebuild in many ways. As the designers kept shaping these toys, it began to feel like they had character and a story. They followed that instinct and crafted a fictional toy universe anchored by four guardians, each with its own role: the Ruler, the Gatekeeper, the Mystic and the Explorer.

The furniture series is framed through the eyes of Scientist Beasley, who happened to step into this universe. After hearing of his disappearance, Grogg, a close friend and protector of the toys, went searching for answers. When he entered Beasley's hideout, everything was intact: the cloches, the miniature dioramas and the furniture pieces he had collected or made. But Beasley himself was gone.

Explorer cloche on the explorer table. A wooden figure floats above a molten red river sculpted in textured resin.

Mystic cloche on the Mystic table. Resin layers create a drifting smoke that recalls rituals. ALL PICS COURTESY: MUSEMART

Worlds inside glass

To articulate this story, Huzefa's studio collaborated with Mumbai-based miniature artists Nayan Shrimali and Venus Bird of The Paper Ark. Their intricate dioramas became tiny windows into each guardian's world. The studio worked at two scales: tiny cloches and larger furniture. The cloches were built slowly by hand with turned-wood figures, sculpted plants, resin terrains, painted details and small metal inserts that catch the light. Each one, from flying fish to winged seahorses, set the mood and showed the flora and fauna of a guardian's realm.

The Gatekeeper cloche introduces the entry point into the toy universe. At its centre sits a wooden figure surrounded by plants and tiny companions. A small squirrel-like creature offering a pineapple brings a touch of humour and hints at their friendship. The entire scene rests on polished reflective metal that lends the feeling of strength.

Explorer table.

The Mystic cloche has a more hazy aura. Resin layers create a drifting smoke that recalls rituals. Beside the Mystic sits Psychowl, part owl and part spirit guide. A glowing sacred stone marked with symbols hints at repeated action, adding to the sense of ritual.

The Explorer cloche shifts into a more dynamic world. A wooden figure floats above a molten red river sculpted in textured resin. The landscape mirrors the Explorer's movement, with a bright colour palette that traces the pathways of their journey.

The Ruler cloche moves into a gentler tone. Pastel colours, soft vegetation and tiny pets surround a calm figure. A fragment of a castle hints at royalty, while a creature with oversized ears rests nearby as if listening closely to the Ruler's thoughts.

Toying with scale

Bridging these miniature worlds to the furniture scale is the Guardian lamp, which turns the Gatekeeper into a small figure carrying a light. Made with sculpted wood, turned components and a balanced metal frame, it recalls old stories of people guiding themselves through forests with a lamp held close.

Kingpin, the scientist's favourite working chair, is royal and rotatable, almost like a throne reimagined for a curious mind. It is made with ash wood, and its manual swivel and carved base give it a handcrafted look. The painted upholstery brings in a burst of colour, like the splash of ink someone might throw down in frustration while thinking for too long.

Totemic is a tall accent chair that carries the language of the toys into full furniture scale. Its stacked backrest resembles a totem pole, which is why the studio named it Totemic. The form is also inspired by how the toys themselves stack and connect. The hand-carved details have a tribal rhythm.

Totemic chair.

The Mystic, Explorer and Gatekeeper tables were originally made as bases so the cloches could sit securely and look like artefacts, not objects floating on a shelf. As the designers refined them, these bases naturally evolved into sculptural tables that carried the same visual language as the cloches.

The Gatekeeper Table uses a chrome-finished form with a ladder-like element that hints at an entry into another universe. The Mystic Table has repeated arches that give it a ritualistic feel, echoing the Mystic's meditative world. The Explorer Table uses a tiered pedestal structure, creating a sense of movement and unpredictability that fits the character. "This long partnership with the Channapatna artisans has since developed into a steady exchange that benefits both the toy makers and our studio," Huzefa adds.

In the end, Beasley might have vanished, but the world he documented remains, in dioramas, in furniture, in characters made of wood and metal, and in the small universes sealed under glass.

ON THE PALETTE

Mountains as a living archive of memory

A recent multi-disciplinary festival brought together artists and communities from across the Himalayan region for a week-long celebration of culture and craft, says Neha Kirpal

The festival also featured Himalayan culinary experiences.

Journeying Across the Himalayas, the annual multidisciplinary festival dedicated to celebrating and safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage of the Himalayas, just concluded its second edition. The festival, organised by Royal Enfield Social Mission, brought together artists, practitioners and communities from across the Himalayan region for a week-long celebration of culture, craft and collaboration.

Anchored in this year's curatorial theme, 'Ours to Tell', the festival presented a layered exploration of the Himalayas as a living archive of memory, identity and resilience through exhibitions, performances, dialogues, workshops and culinary experiences co-created with Himalayan communities and collaborators.

Dhruv Acharya's large-scale metal and mixed-media sculpture, created from dismantled motorcycle parts, formed the centrepiece of the Helmets for India installation. Echoes of the East, an interactive exhibition by Julie Kagti, traced the endangered languages, draping traditions and harvest festivals from Northeast India. Presented through soundscapes, textile displays and seasonal rituals, the exhibition centred the intangible cultural heritage of Northeast India, with a special focus on its Himalayan communities.

Curated by Prachi Joshi, The Himalayan Hub is a constellation of decentralised pavilions — multiple heart(h)s of warmth, dialogue and community. "Ranging from craft-centred initiatives to people-led responsible tourism, from environmental conservation to material explorations, and from reframing heritage to building safe spaces of inclusion, these stories settle around five hearths, each shaped by a distinct purpose. The hub of many heart(h)s is a metaphorical gathering place — inviting every visitor to find community within these stories," explained Joshi.

Material Library of India, a think tank that questions everyday materiality, presented an installation exploring circularity and material innovation in the Indian Himalayan region. Unwoven/Spoken: The Ladakhi Pashmina, an immersive, multi-sensory exhibition, explored Ladakhi Pashmina through its makers and custodians — herders, fibre processors, artisans and brands. Bridging Spaces; Living Roots! was an interactive, multi-sensory installation by Sumant Jayakrishnan crafted from recycled fabrics and materials, using light and reflections to evoke the magic and beauty of Meghalaya's living root bridges.

Live Sand Mandala at the festival.

Sacred Nature was an immersive installation by Aranyani, envisioned as a space where art, ecology and spirituality converge. "Crafted from repurposed invasive lantana and planted with native Himalayan species, it stood as both a warning and a tribute: a reminder of how fragile our ecosystems are, and a homage to the communities who have safeguarded our natural heritage for generations. Here, conservation storytelling becomes an experience—inviting visitors to step into a landscape where restoration, culture, and imagination meet," said Tara Lal, Founder, Aranyani.

Curated by internationally renowned materials expert Chris Lefteri, the Materials Lab Feature offered a deep dive into the evolving world of materials and finishes that define contemporary interiors.

Monks from Namgyal Monastery, Dharamshala, curated a live Sand Mandala, offering an immersive glimpse into the richness of the Tibetan Mandala tradition while preserving its essence and cultural depth. A sacred practice symbolising impermanence, the Sand Mandala is traditionally kept within the monastery. It began to be shared publicly only on the advice of His Holiness, underscoring its profound spiritual significance.

MOTLEY GARDEN

When the garden stopped breathing...

We often believe plants suffer because we haven't given them enough. But sometimes, they suffer because we give too much, writes Subhashini Chandramani

There was a year in the history of my garden when nothing grew. Nothing. Seeds refused to sprout. Foliage froze in place. Even the hibiscus, usually generous, stood still. It felt as though the garden had stopped breathing.

The garden was a year or two old then. Our young gardener, an enthusiastic man from a village near Kanakapura, came armed with modern ideas. He believed that urea and DAP were the cure for everything. He kept saying the grass would turn lush and there would be more flowers if we "nourished" them with these. We were new to it and complied. The plants looked greener at first. They always do when nitrogen floods the soil. Around the same time, I had begun my composting journey with khamba pots. One morning, I opened the back door and found a mass of worms crawling on the floor. I screamed, but then realised no one else was going to deal with them. So I collected the worms carefully and sent them back into the khamba under layers of leaves.

Meanwhile, the gardener continued his quarterly rituals of sprinkling DAP. The plants appeared fine for a while. But when the first wave of mealy bugs arrived, he reached for pesticides used in large fields. The garden smelled sharp and chemical. The pests died; a few plants did too. The rest looked uncomfortable, as though they had been fed too much and too fast. He insisted this was how big farms worked, and we should be happy that the bugs had died.

And then, one day, he stopped coming. The garden, which had become dependent on these artificial boosts, began to collapse without them. When spring came, I loosened the soil and sowed seeds. That was the moment I understood something was wrong. There was no earthy smell. The soil felt flat and exhausted. Hardly anything germinated. The few seedlings that appeared stood uncertain and weak, as if the soil beneath them had nothing left to give. It struck me later: the compost had worms; the soil in my garden did not. One was alive. The other was exhausted. The Rs 500 I had spent on DAP had quietly created an immeasurable loss.

Chemical fertilisers can turn soil into an addict.

I knew I needed help. I reached out to a gardening friend whose advice I trusted. He listened and said something that stayed with me: chemical fertilisers can turn soil into an addict. As long as you keep feeding it urea and DAP, it responds. The moment you stop, the soil has no idea how to function. It forgets how to make its own nutrients, how to cycle organic matter, how to support microbes, and how to breathe. The soil needed to relearn. "Add life back to it," he said. "Give it compost, leaf mould, cow manure. Add anything that once breathed."

So I emptied the pots one by one and rebuilt the soil slowly. I mixed in mature compost, crushed dry leaves, and well-rotted manure. I also added a scoop of my own compost, hoping it would reintroduce some life into the tired soil.

Gardening demands patience when nothing else works. Over the next few months, the soil began to soften. A faint earthy smell returned.

Organic methods rebuild the living fabric of the soil.

And one monsoon morning, after a night of heavy rain, I found a few earthworms on the surface curling away from the light. Since then, I've leaned more gently toward organic methods, for they rebuild the living fabric of the soil.

Watching the garden heal taught me to pay attention to the smallest things. In the years that followed, whenever I reached for compost, cocopeat, or neem cake, I found myself pausing. Why am I adding this? How much does the plant actually need? Is this the right time?

The experiments revealed their own truths. Too much of anything, even good things, can unsettle the soil. A pot of soil must hold the same complexity as the earth itself: the quiet work of microbes, the slow decay of leaves, the patient chemistry of decomposition. None of these can be replaced with shortcuts.

The right measure of anything remains an enigma which each gardener should solve through seasons of attention. We often believe plants suffer because we haven't given them enough. But sometimes, they suffer because we give too much. In gardening, as in life, a measure of everything makes all the difference.

Motley Garden *is your monthly kaleidoscopic view into a sustainable garden ecosystem. The author believes gardens are shared spaces where plants and creatures thrive together. She can be reached at allthingsinmygarden@gmail.com or find more garden notes on social media at @allthingsinmygarden.*

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